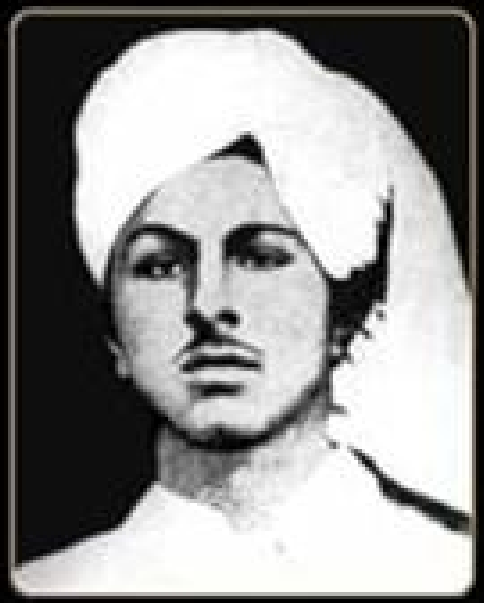
Bhagat Singh and Comrades



Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich

BHAGAT SINGH AND COMRADES

About the Author

Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich was born on 21st November 1929 at Village Ladhewala Warraich, Distt. Gujranwala (Pakistan) and presently resides at village Saketri, Distt. Panchkula.

He acquired Master's degrees in English, History, Political Science, Economics and Sociology from Panjab University, Chandigarh.

After teaching Humanities in Guru Nanak Engineering College, Ludhiana for thirty years, he retired in November 1989. Then he did LL.B from Kurukshetra University as a day scholar and practised in Hon'ble Punjab and Haryana High Court where through Public Interest petitions he succeeded in getting the Kuka Movement, Ghadr Party, Komagata Maru and Jalianwala Bagh martyrs official recognition as movements of freedom struggle besides getting the freedom fighters' lands, confiscated by government, returned to their kin.

He got in touch with Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna for the first time on 6th June 1966. After that he became a life long *Munshi* for the Ghadri Babas.

His first book "Jiwan Sangram: Atam Katha Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna" was published in 1967 after translating it from Urdu into Punjabi; till now he has authored about fifty books on revolutionaries in English, Punjabi and Hindi; this process continues unabated.

Besides, he has devised a gallery of revolutionary struggles "National Gallery of Portraits — 1857-1947", which is located behind Central State Library, Sector 17, Chandigarh.

About the Translator

Born in 1934 at Jalandhar, Dr. Rajinder Singh graduated from the University of Delhi. He attended fourteen courses in leading Management Institutions of the country and abroad. He was awarded Fellowship in Advanced Management at International Management Institute, Sydney (1983) and went on a study tour of England in 1979. He served the Central Government in different Departments and retired as Senior Analyst (Management) (Under Secretary) to the Govt. of India.

He has written over 25 books in Punjabi, Hindi, and English. His novel "The Ganges in Her Platter" was highly acclaimed and according to Dr. Dalip Kaur Tiwana a novel of such a high level has not been written so far in Punjabi. It reminds one of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy. Besides original writings he has translated over one hundred books from Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu. He has translated a number of books relating to the great Martyrs like, Ram Prasad Bismil, Bhagat Singh and associates, Ghadr Movement and War of Independence 1857 to the 20th Century as also "War and Freedom" and "Echoes of Mutiny" by Gyani Bhagwan Singh and books of leading Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu writers both Indians and Pakistanis into English. A number of tracts, series of articles in magazines, review of books, editing of books (Punjabi and English). Edited English-Hindi quarterly Print (Govt. of India) for five years.

BHAGAT SINGH AND COMRADES

Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich

Translator:
Dr. Rajinder Singh

Bhagat Singh and Comrades

© **Author**
Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich
Ph: 0172-2556314
Email: mjswaraich29@gmail.com

Translator:
Dr Rajinder Singh
M: 9357215560
Email: rajinder_rahi@yahoo.com

Typesetting and Layout :
RAMESH KUMAR
1285-B, PHASE 10, MOHALI
PH: 0172-2233331, 09464952065

1

Events - Details

Personal Bio-data

1. Bhagwati Charan Vohra ..... 15.11.1903 - 28.05.1930
2. Durga Bhabi .....07.101907 - 15.10.1999
3. Chandra Shekhar Azad ..... 23.07.1966 - 27.02.1931
4. Bhagat Singh ..... 28.09.1907 - 23.03.1931
5. Sukh Dev ..... 19.02.1907 - 23.03.1931
6. Raj Guru ..... 24.08.1908 - 23.03.1931
7. Jatin Das ..... 27.10.1904 - 13.09.1929
8. B.K. Dutt..... 18.11.1910 - 20.02.1962
9. Vijay Kumar Sinha ..... 18.01.1909 - 16.07.1992
10. Shiv Verma ..... 18.01.1907 - 10.01.1997
11. Jai Dev Kapur ..... 24.10.1908 - 19.09.1994
12. Mahavir Singh ..... 16.09.1904 - 17.05.1933
13. Dr. Gaya Prasad ..... 10.06.1900 - 10.-2.1993
14. Kisori Lal..... 09.06.1909 - 11.07.1990
15. Prem Dutt ..... 19.09.1911 - .....
16. Surinder Pandey .... - 13.06.1992
17. Ajoy Ghosh ..... 20.02.1909 - 13.01.1962
18. Jatinder Sanyal..... ..... - 10.05.1990

Event - Chronology

- Jalianwala Massacre 13.04.1919
- Non-cooperation Movement ..... 01.08.1920 - 12.02.1922
- Azad punished with 15 lashes 1921
- Esstablishment of H.R.A. 1923
- Publication of H.R.A Manifesto ..... January 1925
- Kakokri Dacoity ..... 9 August 1925

- Establishment of 'Naujwan Bharat Sabha' in Lahore ..... 13 March 1926
- Bhagat Singh's first arrest- Dussehra Bomb Case ..... 29 May 1927
- Bhagat Singh's release on bail ..... 4 July 1927
- Hanging of four revolutionaries of Kakori:
  - Rajinder Nath Lahiri ..... 17 December 1927
  - Ram Prasad Bismal ..... 19 December 1927
  - Ashfaq Ullah ..... 19 December 1927
  - Roshan Singh ..... 19 December 1927
- The first conference of Naujwan Bharat Sabha in Amritsar and issue of its Manifesto ..... 13-14 April 1928
- Establishement of HSRA ..... 8-9 September 1928
- Lahore visit of Simon Commission ..... 30 October 1928
- Lala Lajpat Rai death ..... 17 November 1928
- Saunder's murder ..... 17 December 1928
- Bhagat Singh and Rajguru escape from Lahore ..... 20 December 1928
- Azad's escape from Lahore ..... 25 December 1928
- Revolutionaries assemble at Agra Centre ..... l January - 31 March 1929
- Trial of bomb near Jhansi ..... 6 March 1929
- Bomb Explosion in Delhi Assembly ..... 8 April 1929
- Police raid on Kashmir Building Centre, Lahore: Sukh Dev, Kishori Lal and Jaigopal's arrest ..... 15 April 1929
- Arrests at Saharanpur Centre:
  - Shiv Verma and Jai Dev Kapur ..... 13 May 1929
  - Dr. Gaya Prasad at Saharanpur ..... 15 May 1929
- Written statement by Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt in Delhi Court ..... 6 June 1929
- Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt sentenced to life imprisonment ..... 12 June 1929
- Bhgat Singh's transfer to Miawali and B.K. Dutt's to Lahore Jail ..... 15-16 June 1929
- Issue of warrants against Bhagwati Charan in Lahore Conspiracy Case ..... July 1929

- Start of Court proceedings in Lahore Conspiracy Case (The Court set up in Lahore Central Jail, Special Magistrate's Court) ... 10 July 1929-3 May 1930
- Bhagwan Das Mahaur and Sadashiv Malkapurkar arrested in Bhusawal ..... 11 September 1929
- Martyrdom of Jatin Das ..... 13 Setpember 1929
- Raj Guru's arrest ..... 30 September 1929
- Ahmedgarh dacoity ..... 15 October 1929
- Azad and Bhagwati Bhai meet ..... Novmeber 1929
- Distribtuion of H.S.R.A Manisfesto in Congress Session at Lahore ..... 25 Decembr 1929
- Issue of "Philosophy of Bomb ..... 26 January 1930
- Jalgaon Jail, Maharashtra — Bhagwan Das Mahaur and Sadashiv's atttempt to kill approvers Phaninder Das and Jaigopal ..... 1 February 1930
- Start of proceedings of Special Tribunal in Lahore ..... 5 May 1930
- Bhagwati Charan Vohra's martyrdom ..... 28 May 1930
- Bomb explosion in Lahore bungalow ..... 2 June 1930
- Leaving Lahore Centre ..... 2 June 1930
- Delhi-Gadoria Store Dacoity ..... 6 June 1930
- Framing of charges by Special Tribunal ..... 10 July 1930
- Judgement ..... 7 October 1930
- Attack on Police Post Lamington Road, Bombay 9 October1930
- Submission of appeal in Privy Council October 1930
- Public announcement of Bhagwati Bhai's martyrdom ..... 4 January 1931
- Dismissal of appeal by Privy Council ..... 12 February 1931
- Vishvanath Vaishampayan's arrest ..... 12 February 1931
- Azad's martyrdom ..... 27 February 1931
- Final orders for hanging ..... 17-18 March 1931
- Hanging ..... 23 March 1931 (7 P.M.)
- Announcement of hanging ..... 24 March 1931 (morning)

A bird's eye view

1 Bhagat Singh and Sukh Dev brought up at Lyallpur ... 11

2 Joins Bhagwati Charan Vohra 15

3 Hindustan Republican Association 21

4 At Lahore — *Naujwan Bharat Sabha* 29

5 DAV College Hostel, Kanpur 36

6 Azad at Jhansi 52

7 From 'Republican' to Socialist Republican' Delhi: 8-9 September 1928 63

8 A turning point 70

9 A miracle 82

10 Death defying hunger strikes in jails 102

11 "Rescuing Bhagat Singh and Dutt" 113

12 Face to face with Court 123

13 Special Tribunal, a steam-roller 131

14 "We depart..." 138

1

Bhagat Singh and Sukh Dev brought up at Lyallpur

Lyallpur's barren land, upon irrigation by newly dug canals during late nineteenth century, led to a 'green revolution' soon after. This transformation was necessary to sustain the 'industrial revolution' in England to provide plenty of food grains and raw materials like cotton but alongside it also provided a fertile ground for first popular revolt in 1907 protesting against the draconian colonies Bill depriving the landowners of their all basic right of ownership of their lands; moreover, it also nurtured Bhagat Singh and Sukh Dev who both were born in 1907; Sukh Dev was born, in the downtown Mohalla Naughara of Ludhiana on 19th February 1907: But it so happened that he too, after three years, went over to Lyallpur, due to the demise of his father, to live with his patriot uncle Achint, a trader in agriculture products who got close to Bhagat Singh's rebellious family; out of this association was born Bharat Mata Society in 1907 as the Peoples' Movement.

As for Bhagat Singh, one of his ancestors left for Hardwar from village Narli near Tarn Taran, for immersion of the ashes of an elder one and halted overnight on the way at Khatkar Kalan near Banga, in the *haveli* of a sardar. On his return journey also he halted there and his matrimonial alliance was settled with the Sardar's only daughter and he came to settle down there as the estate owner son-in-law.

Long after, Bhagat Singh's grandfather Arjan Singh, decided to settle in the vast canal irrigated land of Lyallpur in the beginning of the twentieth century in Banga Chak 105, where Bhagat Singh was born on 28th September 1907.

Like Sukh Dev, Bhagat Singh's family too was of Arya Samajists and both the families were equally patriotic and enlightened. Whenever Bhagat Singh's father or grandfather visited Lyallpur, their junction used to be Sukh Dev's family shop of commission agents (*Aarhati*), where generally was present his uncle Wali Ram also, where the two kids played together and grew up in the company of these elders, leading to their life long companionship.

Just as Sukh Dev had begun to learn from his uncle, right from his childhood about the aims and objects of the people's movement, Bhagat Singh too, imbibed love for freedom in the company of the patriotic father and grandfather, besides being the pet of his two *Chachais*, Smt. Harnam Kaur w/o S. Ajit Singh about whom none had any clue since 1910, and young widow Smt. Hukam Kaur w/o S. Swaran Singh, who fell a martyr soon after their marriage, which turned the child revengeful towards the white rulers.

Though both of then did not lack love and affection, yet too much of pampering had made Sukdev rather stubborn and self-willed, which later irked many of his associates in the party and became the cause of quite a few misunderstandings about him, whereas Bhagat Singh was relatively sociable and accomodating.

In a way, Bhagat Singh and Sukh Dev counter balanced each other, who continued to differ violently many a time yet remained glued with each other till their last.

Learning about the bloodshed at Jallianwala Bagh the innocent souls of both of them were clawed deeply. Next day Bhagat Singh left for his school at Lahore but reached the blood-splashed place of the holocaust at Jallianwala, Amritsar, and from there he picked up a fistful of blood- soaked earth which he put in a bottle. He might have let it go out of sight sometimes, but never forgot it and worshipped it throughout his life.

Sukh Dev also, on the 14th April, talked with his uncle Achint about this barbaric event. Simultaneously, as per the government orders, in the Sanatam Dharma High School, where

he studied, a white officer appeared at the prayer time, who had to be saluted by every student as he passed by: But how could Sukh Dev do that? As he bluntly refused, the Headmaster thrashed him brutally, but then till the orders were withdrawn, he did not enter the school. Thus the process of their turning rebels had begun in 1919 itself.

After about ten months of this tragedy, on 20th February, 1921, when about one hundred and fifty Sikh devotees, who had gone to Gurudwara Nankana Sahib to pay obeisance, were slaughtered by the *goondas* of Narain Das, the *Mahant* of the Gurdwara, kerosene oil was sprinkled on their dead bodies which were then set on fire. At that point of time corrupt *Mahants* were in possession of historical Gurdwaras who were fully supported by the government of the day.

After a few days of this tragedy, Bhagat Singh attended a conference held there to pay homage to the martyrs and obtained the Martyrdom calendar and like the other devotees and Sikhs in general; he too donned a black turban. Also he started learning-reading and writing Gurmukhi (the script of the Punjabi Language) along with his younger sister Amar Kaur. This proved to be a boon by enabling him to write for *Kirti* Magazine. Notably, while he wrote his letters to his grandfather in Urdu, he used to write to his aunt, Hukam Kaur, in Punjabi-Gurmukhi, the only language she knew.

Storm over the Rowlatt Bill

During the First World War, the Government, having faced revolutionary movements in Punjab, Bengal and Maharashtra, drafted a ruthless law — Rowlatt Act, under which even for peaceful agitations, very harsh punishments had been provided. Ironically, the epitome of non-violence, Gandhiji, in 1917, as a volunteer and in his capacity as a 'Recruiting Sergeant' prompted the Indian Youth to join the Imperial Army.

The War had already shed a lot of blood of the Indians in the battlefields, and the rest was sucked up by up by inflation and shortage of daily necessities. Their patience had already

run out, and like a bolt from the blue descended this savage law, which infuriated the people and the wave of their rage spread far and wide in the country like a wild fire.

Because of this whirlwind of the people's resentment, a pro-government leader like Mahatma Gandhi, willy-nilly had to lead the Non-cooperation Movement and declared that, "I will get you Swaraj in one year!" Meanwhile the revolutionaries also suspended their activities so that they could not be blamed for disrupting Gandhiji's campaign.

As for Bhagat Singh, having passed his fourth class in the village school and joined DAV School in Lahore. His father also had to find a place in Lahore, which also become the hub of political activities. He bought a piece of land, in village Khwasrian sufficient for farming just across the river Ravi in village Khawasrian, had got a well dug there and started farming. The family also kept some buffalos and started supplying milk to Lahore. S. Kishan Singh had another occupation also, that of agency of an insurance company, the Lahore office of which also became the meeting place for the boys. As milk was available in abundance, Bhagat Singh became a *Doodha-dhari* (a milk addict) and did never let his group of friends suffer from want of milk.

Gandhi had given a call to the school and college students to boycott the government and government recognised schools, while National Schools and Colleges had been opened for them, where the books and teachers for creating national awakening were available. Those very days, Sukh Dev passed his Matriculation and joined Lahore National College in 1922, but Bhagat Singh was still in the tenth class. He was admitted on the condition that he would pass the admission test in two months, which he did, working day and night, and in this way both of them became fellow students too.

2

Joins Bhagwati Charan Vohra

In the same college, which Bhagat Singh and Sukh Dev had joined, was Bhagwati Charan Vohra, four years senior to them in age. He was from a Gujrati Brahmin community of traders, who had been living in Lahore since long. Bhagwati's father however, was a high ranking officer in the Railways, and a staunch supporter of the government by virtue of which he had been conferred much sought after title of *Rai Bahadur*; Bhagwati was born on 15th November 1903.

Bhagwati's father had a fellow Gujarati Brahmin friend who was a Sessions Judge in UP: Durga Devi was born on 7th October 1907, in that family. Strangely enough their marriage was solemnised in 1919 when both of them were yet minors. Unfortunately before Bhagwati and Durga came of age, their mothers had expired. When the government awarded the title of *Rai Bahadur* to Bhagwati's father, he organised a big function to celebrate the occasion in which, perhaps for the first time, some English guests too were expected. There was a lot of curiousity in the neighbourhood also about this event as Britishers were coming. On the other hand, although Bhagwati was not yet associated with the freedom struggle, in his heart of hearts he hated the Britishers and hence he quietly left home to stay with a friend that night.

Bhagwati's mother, like Durga's mother, had expired when he was yet an infant and soon after their marriage; now his father also expired. Bhagwati inherited half the properties of the very rich family, and the other half was to go to his elder brother, who taking advantage of the decency of the younger brother, grabbed the best houses and gave only the inferior

Bhagwati Charan Vohra
with his wife Durga Devi and child Shachi

ones to Bhagwati; whereupon one of Bhagwati's teachers, who was their tenant also, advised him to raise objection, but, he replied casually that it hardly made any difference to him.

In no time, his house became a 'Guest House'; he had enough money, large-heartedness, hospitable wife and hence all sorts of people began visiting them. Friends like Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Yashpal sometimes spent the whole day there. In this way this house had become the prime meeting hub in the city of Lahore. Youngmen here discussed literature, arts, politics, history and current events for hours and thanks to Durgaji's hospitality, they were generously served refreshments.

Durga while recalling that initial period of Bhagat Singh's life that there was a *halwai* (confectioner) shop in *Chirimaran Mohalla*, where boiled milk, delicious milk cakes and delicacies were ever available. A tall, handsome Sikh boy used to bring milk in brass pitchers in a *tonga* to the shop when quite a few mud soaked wrestlers also used to come there directly from the *akhara* to drink milk. This Sikh youngster

became chummy with some of them and they began to get free milk. He sometimes got them served them milk-cake and cream also and he relished doing so. When one of these boys once quizzed him saying that he had been losing so much money for them how would he account for this to his parents because the confectioner would deduct the money spent on them, he simply laughed. This young man was none else than Bhagat Singh S. Kishan Singh's darling son, the nephew of S. Ajit Singh, a famous national leader, who had been exiled from the country by the British Government.

"To be precise I had seen and known Bhagat Singh since 1921; I distinctly remember even today that when he used to come from the village to deliver milk, his clothes used to be shabby and shoes worn out. …when I was introduced to him for the first time, he was sporting a dirty and untidy *khadi* turban loosely wrapped around his head, one end of which hung down his shoulder. His worn out shoes had many patches; well of course not for want of resources.

"Even today my mind refuses to accept whether actually it was the very same rustic carefree Bhagat Singh, who had shaken the roots of the British rule."

Sushila *Didi*

Sushila 'Didi'

Though she too was a 'Gujrati', like Vohra's, but, she hailed from District Gujrat, a hundred kilometres to the north-west of Lahore on the bank of the river Chenab. Her father was an Army doctor, who, during the First World War (1914-17), had got disgusted with the government policy to purposely send mostly the Indian soldiers to the war theatre, and had inwardly turned against the government. He had decided not to send his children to govt. or govt. recognised schools. Like her beloved 'Bhai' and 'Bhabi',

Sushila's mother also expired before the beginning of the children's education and she being the eldest sibling, had to bring up her younger brothers and sisters. They had their early education under the care of their uncle and aunt at Gujranwala. Thereafter they studied in national schools and Didi received her college education at Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar, where the patriot Principal was Kumari Lajja Wati, her association with whom proved to be decisive. Shushila had come in contact with Vohras and other revolutionaries through her only; instead of spending her vacations with her father, she used to stay with Bhai and Bhabi at Lahore, with whom her association became life long.

Much later, Sushila, courtesy Kumari Lajja Wati, was employed by a wealthy Punjabi Seth Chhaju Mal, in Calcutta as a resident tutor for their daughter. When after the assassination of Saunders, Bhagat Singh had reached Calcutta with 'Bhabi' they all had stayed in the *haveli* of the Seth. The Seth also had, in fact, made up his mind not to send her daughter to a govt. or govt. recognised school, because he felt that the education imparted there could inculcate loyalty to the British Raj rather than to develop patriotism among the students.

It was almost during almost those very days that Bhagwati family came in contact with Sukhdev Raj, who later on became known as '**Sukhdev Raj**, M.A.' This college going boy of Dina Nagar-Gurdaspur desired to seek admission in B.A. at Lahore, but his father was not willing to pay for his education. The boy happened to be an admirer of Lala Lajpat Rai and he had met Bhagwati during Lalaji's election campaign in 1925 during an election rally, where the workers of the Naujwan Bharat Sabha were distributing leaflets containing an English poem, which made fun of Lalaji since he had turned communal. Lalaji's followers were thrashing the workers of the Naujwan Bharat Sabha, and Bhagat Singh and Bhagwati also became their targets; Bhagwati got acquainted with Sukhdev Raj, who had quarrelled with him over this issue.

Bhagwati in turn calmly brought him home became his guardian, and arranged for his education. In this way he became one with the Vohra family besides the revolutionary movement also.

Drama troupes

During the National College days, the students organised drama troupes to awaken the people against slavery by staging plays here and there. Outwardly the plays were traditional but by twisting the dialogues the boys were able to convey the desired message; the plays like 'Maharana Partap', 'Chander Gupt Maurya' were amongst those commonly staged: Bhagat Singh's photograph with turban figures in the group photograph of actors who once staged 'Chander Gupt Maurya'.

Bhagat Singh was so much enamoured of Maharana Partap that while in jail, when he was told that a son had been born to his younger sister Amar Kaur, he proposed that he be named Partap Singh!

Bhagat Singh's English not upto the mark

Amongst the languages learnt by him, Sanskriat was his first love and he had a good command over Hindi and Punjabi too. Yet this capability eluded him in the matter of English. For instance while once during his student days whilst he did

a part time job as a correspondent of a Hindi paper, he was given an English piece of news for translation into Hindi captioned "Editor of Defunct 'Nation' is in Lahore", which was translated as '*Defunct Nation ka sampadak Lahore men hai*.' When Bhagat Singh was asked by the editor to have a re-look he did not find any fault therein. Hence he was asked to consult the dictionary only then he realised his error. To his credit, Bhagat Singh's English in his prime days as reflected vide his writings in English is excellent, to say the least.

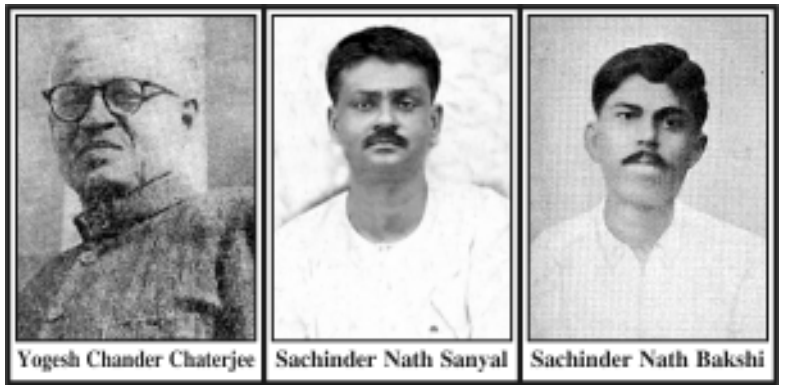
3

Hindustan Republican Association

Arbitrary suspension of Non-Cooperation Movement by Gandhiji's on 22.2.1922 following a mishap at the police station at Chauri Chaura (Distt. Gorakhpur, U.P.), where a mob of protesters had set the police station building on fire in revenge to brutal police *lathi* charge on peaceful processionists. Gandhiji, without consulting anyone called off the *Satyagraha*/Movement stating that the nation was not yet really qualified for a peaceful agitation.

Naturally, people in general all over India were shocked and puzzled including revolutionaries who had suspended their militant activities at Gandhiji's advice during his *Satyagraha*. Hence they desperately began exploring the other options.

Jogesh Chatterji, a leading figure in Bengal's oldest revolutionary outfit 'Anushilan Samiti' selected Benaras as the launching pad of the proposed pan India revolutionary party. He roped in revolutionaries of U.P. and associated Sachindra Bakshi and Shachindra Nath Sanyal an ex-Ghadrite of 1914-15 fame in this task. The new party was named 'Hindustan



Yogesh Chander Chaterjee | Sachinder Nath Sanyal | Sachinder Nath Bakshi

Republican Association' signifying its national identity to achieve a Republican form of government in India through all means peaceful or otherwise.

The party also issued its manifesto, 'The Revolutionary' with a socialistic orientation, thus turning a new leaf in Indian revolutionary movement and ending up as a forerunner of Hindustan Socialistic Republican Association. In Punjab Bhagwati, Bhagat Singh and Sukh Dev were its foremost organisers. This happened during 1923-24.

Bhagat Singh, the link

Bhagat Singh had just joined B.A., when matrimonial proposals began to pour in from well to do families. Of them, one, the Manawalia family, got very much insistent; they paid a few visits to their house in this regard. Bhagat Singh talked about them with his mother with relish and his family thought that he would give his consent. For that matter, much later when his mother told him while he was in jail about her marriage with big dowry, he joked that she must be feeling that I deprived her of huge bounty!

The date of betrothal had also been fixed. But during the night before, the boy disappeared. He took some money out of the (Lahore) office drawer of his father, wrote a letter and placed it on the table, stating, "At the time of my Sacred Thread (*Janeu*) ceremony, *Babaji* had dedicated me to the country and I am going to fulfil this vow." This was in September 1923. The entire family was stunned; it was natural to be so. Now, had they any clue about the boy's whereabouts, they could think of some compromise, but the boy had ensured that no one at home should know as to where he had gone.

All this while both Bhagat Singh and Sukh Dev had been in touch with Shachindera Sanyal at Lahore itself. In fact, Bhagat Singh had mentioned to Shachindera Sanyal about the proposal for his betrothal who had told him plainly, "Either get married or become a revolutionary. You can't sail in two boats." Sanyal on his part had conveyed this to Jogesh

Chatterji at Kanpur, who gave him his Kanpur address and asked him to send Bhagat Singh to him.

Bhagat Singh reached Kanpur with with 'bag and baggage', which he deposited in some inn and knocked at Chatterjee's door. When both of them set out to collect his luggage, it transpired that Bhagat Singh did neither remember the name of the inn nor its location. They searched here and there and ultimately found the inn and brought back his belongings. There were a number of hostels there but almost all of them were occupied by Bengali youngmen. How could a tall Sardar remain inconspicuous among them? Then Chatterjee, with the help of eminent patriotic Editor of the *Pratap*, Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, got him employed as a 'Proof Reader' and also he was given a room to reside in the office building itself.

Back Home

Notwithstanding his job, Bhagat Singh continued taking an active part in the activities of the H.R.A. He very well knew that if his parents came to know about his whereabouts, his stay there would become impossible. Therefore, he gave no clue to them about his hide-out. Still his family people had somehow come to know about his being at Kanpur but Bhagat Singh himself remained elusive. When informed him through a third person of the serious illness of his grandmother and assured that he would not be compelled to get married on his return, Bhagat Singh thus returned home after about six months. Upon reaching home he nursed his grandmother with utmost care and soon after she was able to stand on her feet. When he had no worry about his grandmother, he again resumed his activities.

Bhagat Singh's first arrest warrants follow *Jaito Morcha langar*

The Sikhs had struggle a lot to secure control of their historic Gurdwaras by launching agitations *morchas* during 1920-25. One of these was called Jaito Morcha. In connection

with this particular *morcha* the Sikhs decided to protest against the dethroning of the patriotic Raja of Nabha; *Akhand Path* (continuous reading) of Sri Guru Granth Sahib had been started at Gurdwara Gangsar-Jaito, when police entered the Gurdwara and disrupted the *Akhand Path*, following which a mass satyagraha movement was launched. A *Jatha* (batch) of five hundred each would start from different places and converage at Akal Takhat in Amritsar from where they left in turns for Jaito where they were 'welcomed' with bullets and *lathis*, but the volunteers had vowed to remain peaceful.

The *Jatha*, walking all the way, would partake *langar* in the villages on the way and also stay overnight as well as per their schedule, where the supporters of government tried their level best to disrupt their food and stay organised by their sympathisers. A Jatha of five hundred was to start from Lyallpur in the beginning of April 1924 and it had to dine and stay overnight at Bhagat Singh's village, Chak 105 Banga. The leaders of the movement approached S. Kishen Singh, who had to be in Bombay on that day due to circumstances beyond his control. Therefore he entrusted this responsibility to his young son, so much mutual trust being there between the father and his seventeen years old son. But their staunch rival was a member of their own family, S. Dilbagh Singh, Hony. Magistrate, who used to brag before the authorities that in his village not even a blade of grass could stir without his permission.

The prestige of both sides was at stake. According to the well thoughtout plan of Bhagat Singh, *langar* was cooked on the periphery of the village and served to the Jatha in the fields, where he also made a fiery speech. It took no time for the warrants of arrest being issued against him. Not only that, while the warrants of all those, who had participated in the movement, were withdrawn earlier, Bhagat Singh's warrant was cancelled only after eight months later. During this period, Bhagat Singh reportedly distributed at Lahore "The Revolutionary" in January 1925 and on the occasion of the Conference at Gujranawala, he took part in a political drama

in October 1925, but mostly he remained out of Punjab.

Chander Shekhar Azad's past:

Bhagat Singh had met Azad while both of them participated in HRA's "actions" under Bismils' leadership. Chandra Shekhar Azad was born in the state of Alirajpur (in today's Madhya Pradesh) in a tribal belt village Bhanwra's, on 26 July 1906. His father was Sita Ram Tiwari, and mother, Jagrani Devi. This orthodox Brahmin family, extremely poor, originally hailed from Unnao (UP), from where due to a famine, they had migrated to Bhanwra with the support of a relative. Though living in abject poverty, they believed in living on honest earning. His father had once got the job of a *chowkidar* (watchman) in the Forest department, where he did not permit any officer or a worker to pluck even a flower or fruit from the forest nor did he himself do so. Therefore, very soon he got fed up with this routine and chose to remain unemployed. So also in his personal life he was extremely self respecting: Once his wife was bringing some salt she borrowed from a neighbouring house; when he came to know he got furious and asked her to return it and said that no matter they could make do without salt in one meal.

Living in isolation from the outside world, a sympathiser of the family, Shri Manohar Lal, who was well educated and was employed there in the Revenue Department, kept Chandra Shekhar in his house and tried his best to educate him, but the child evaded learning and often slipped away in the company of the Bhil boys for hunting. Consequently, he could not go beyond the third form in Hindi. Manohar Lal, having failed to educate him, making use of his clout in the department got him employed as a *daftry* (helper) in his an office. But this wayward boy, who regarded even his school as a jail, could hardly continue in this suffocating atmosphere: Soon after, he left the place for Bombay without telling anyone.

Bombay

It so happened that a jeweler used to come from Bombay

to Azad's village on his business rounds. Talking to him now and then, he learnt about the Bombay city and made up his mind to go there, but then he had absolutely no idea of the outside world, so much so that he had not even seen a railway train; yet one odd day he reached Bombay with that trader.

Catapulted from a desolate Bhanwra to a metropolis like Bombay, on the first day he just kept staring at the new spectacles, but after two-three days, on enquiring from here and there, he got a job in the ship yard and stayed in the labour colony along with his fellow labourers. But the place they slept at night was a very cramped place and then the cigarette-bidi smoke was adding to the suffocation. In order to breathe freely very often he went to a movie and he saw so many pictures those days that he never turned towards cinema after that. Rather he used to advise his associates not to watch movies, because the intelligence police kept an eye there more often than not.

Benares

Having got fed up with the life of a cog in the wheel, it occured to him why not go to Benares and learn the ancestral vocation of a *Pandit* which had been his father's dream too. So he reached there and joined a *pathshala* (school) where there was the arrangement for boarding lodging also in the adjacent Dharamasala (inn), which was funded by donations. Now a youngster, who had evaded after studying very simple Hindi, was now struggling with *Shastras* and *Vyakaran* (Sanskrit scriptures and grammar): Wisely enough he had informed his family through a letter to Shri Manohar Lal about his whereabouts, probably for the first time after leaving home.

Satyagrahi Azad

He was hardly fifteen, when Azad was drawn towards the Non-cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi and got arrested; when the Magistrate asked him his name, he said "Azad". In this way he became famous as Chandra Shekhar 'Azad'. Being under age, he was awarded punishment of fifteen

lashes to be inficted in jail and not imprisonment. According to the prison rules, every lash of a cane used to be very cruel and severely injured the victim but he while, shouting "Bande Matram" bravely underwent the punishment of fifteen lashes. This episode made him so very well known that the news reached even persons like Jawaharlal Nehru, who had mentioned this episode in his Autobirgraphy while recalling it upon meeting with Chandra Shekhar at his house at Allahabad in February 1931.

As Azad came out of the jail gate, people carried him on their shoulders and later got clicked his photograph standing close to a *Charkha* (spinning wheel). After Gandhiji had given up the agitation, like other countless youngmen, he too got disappointed with his politics and while looking for an alternative; he joined the H.R.A. and soon after, started roping in others also to this party. He was known as 'Quicksilver' amongst his comrades due to his daredevilry.

Chela of an *Udasi Mahant*

The party learnt that there was a huge fort like *dera* of an aged *Udasi* saint (This order of Udasis was founded by Guru Nanak's elder son Baba Sri Chand — Ed.) who was on the look out of a successor (*chela*-disciple). The party decided that Azad may be deputed for this assignment and in due course of time the *Dera* would be an ideal base for Party activities after the demise of the *Baba* in near future. So this was done and Azad, who had deserted his school, to avoid studies had to learn Gurmukhi and *Japuji Sahib* by heart on becoming his

disciple. After some time Azad found that the old man was still hale and hearty and hence was not likely to die in foreseeable future — So he quietly left the place and returned to Benares. He derived full benefit later from this experience during his Jhansi phase in the guise of a *Sanyasi* (Recluse).

From Benares to Jhansi

On the 9th of August 1925, the Party had looted the govt. treasury after stopping a train at Kakori Station which led to arrest of almost the entire front rank leaders of the party on 25th September 1925. Before the arrests had begun, a few of them apprehended danger. Azad, who was in Benares at that time who, without waiting for the decision of the party in this regard, left Benares pretending that he was going home. In fact, if he so desired, he could stay at home and relax, as none in the party knew his home address. But instead of going home, he went to Jhansi. Soon after a leader of the party, Sachindra Bakshi, who was then staying at Jhansi to rejuvenate his party, had to leave Jhansi because of police surveillance and he was in search of a suitable successor. When he came to know about Azad's presence in Jhansi and despite his being less educated, he was entrusted the responsibility of Jhansi centre, pershaps for the reason that as per his perception, Azad was *Dharti Putra* (son of the soil). To contextualise, it so happened that once 24 workers of the Party were travelling together in train, for some action. When all of them alighted the train at Shahjahanpur, it occured to Bakshi Ji that suppose if the police were keeping a vigil there, who would be able to escape? He eyed all the associates one by one, but he did not find Azad. Then he discovered that Azad was holding the stick of an old lady and talking to her in her lingo and after handing over two tickets at the gate, casually got out of the station, thereupon it occured to him that Azad was a pristine *Dharti Putra*.

4

At Lahore — *Naujawan Bharat Sabha*

Enter two minors — Prem Dutt Verma and Kishori Lal Ratan

After passing their Matriculation examination, both of them joined DAV College, Lahore, in June 1927, and later both of them left their studies in November 1928 and became full time party workers. Prem Dutt hailed from Gujrat city (now in Pakistan) and Kishori Lal came from village Dharampur, PS Hajipur, District Hoshiarpur but his father Pt. Raghbir Dutt Shastri served as teacher at Multan, and was a Congressite.

Both of them stayed at Guru Dutt Bhavan in Lahore, from where they disappeared together in December 1928. Kishori Lal's three elder brothers were patriots and at his instance, one of his elder brothers took him along to meet Bhagat Singh. But when he expressed his desire to join the Party Bhagat Singh, in view of his short height and tender age, said, 'You are too young yet, Kishori. Our path is very dangerous, treckking on which is not yet possible for you.'

Kishori retorted, "In order to construct a building, along with full bricks, some pebbles are also required. Likewise please fit me also in the your this edifice of freedom struggle." Bhagat Singh yielded and Kishori played a noteworthy role in the movement.

In due course of time, whereas Kishori Lal proved to be a man of action, Prem Dutt proved to be a man of letters, and that is why Kishori Lal was arrested from the bomb factory and a heap of books was recovered from Prem Dutt's house. It appears from the court records that the party, considering Prem Dutt to be more at home in reading-writing, asked him to join a Typing

college at Ferozepore and a notebook regarding bomb making in his handwriting was also recovered from Lahore bomb workshop. Kishori Lal did not get married throughout his life like Shiv Verma and remained a whole timer of the Communist Party till his last.

A personal note — All of us youngmen used to address him as, "Pandit Ji', with whom I had the good fortune of meeting many a time during of Martyrdom celebrations. Once when I read the Lahore Conspiracy Case *file* for the first time, a witness had made a mention that a man of medium height came to me, who had a squint in one of his eyes, which I had never noticed, and hence when I met him next time, only then I had noticed that what the witness had said was right.

Pandit Ji inspite of his being a staunch Communist spoke only about the life and activities of the revolutionaries on such occasions and never uttered a word about Communism. By virtue of his charming-style of speech he was a crowd puller *par excellence* He departed from this world on 11th July 1990.

A group photograph clicked on 10th March 1970 at Lyallpur Khalsa Csollege, Jalandhar depicts Pandit Ji with Ghadrite *Baba* Harnam Singh (extreme left), students, staff and participants, including the writer (on extreme right).

Prem Dutt on the other hand, went in for higher education upon release. After retiring from the high position of Head of the History Department in the Punjab University, he emigrated to America and despite our best efforts it has not been possible to know about his subsequent life.

Prem Dutt

Naujawan Bharat Sabha's aims and objectives

1. To arouse the feelings of patriotism among the youth;
2. To sensitise the people against social evils like communalism, untouchability and superstitions;

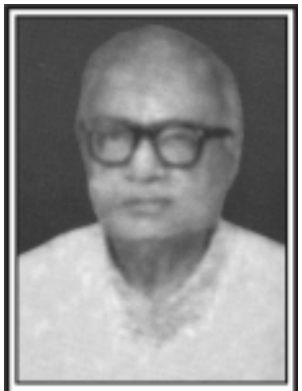
and 3. To organise the peasants and workers.

The Sabha, by organising common *langars*, staging very instructive plays and preaching about the martyrs through martyrdom day celebrations, kick started a vast radical movement, which succeeded in enlisting public support for 1929-31 hunger strikes of jailed revolutionaries and later during the campaigns launched to get the sentence of 'Hanging to death' commuted which had unnerved the government.

Com. Ram Chandar was its president, Bhagat Singh, General Secretary, and Bhagwati Charan was its Propaganda Secretary, who had drafted its Manifesto, which was released at Amritsar-Jallianwala Conference in April 1928.

Lahore's Dwarka Das Library, and its Librarian: Raja Ram Shastri

For the college students of Lahore those days, Dwarka Das Library was no less than a boon; here latest books on every subject were available, especially for the forward looking young men on History, Political Science and Economics plus all the world famous books *as well*. And above all, it was the dynamic young librarian Raja Ram Shastri, who had come straight from Benaras University and whose topic of research


Raja Ram Shastri

was the French Revolution. He kept a very close eye on the students coming to the library and upon finding an opportunity; he offered them such books, which created awakening in their minds. The very same Raja Ram, later on became famous as a political and labour leader of UP, and wrote his memoirs when he was 75, upon reading which, one feels as if for him all that had happened in those distant days was only like yesterday.

Recalls he "After I reached Lahore, I read socialist literature and became a socialist and had an occasion to meet youngmen like Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev, Yashpal and Bhagwati Charan Vohra, who became my friends, especially Bhagat Singh and Sukh Dev, who became my chums. I stayed in a a very small room, which could hardly accommodate one cot and from time to time (typically) Sukh Dev and Bhagat Singh walked to my room around 1AM (midnight). They would knock at the door thrice and I would open. Both of them sit down on the flanks of the cot and then after a few moments, lay down on my right and left; feeling suffocated, I would leave the cot and lay down on the floor and they remain in my bed. Then Bhagat Singh would say to Sukh Dev, 'Look, Sukh Dev, you must admit that Raja Ram is a very decent person, as soon as he saw that guests had come, he left his cot for them. Who can beat him?'

"I would feel I had been doubly cheated, on the one hand I was deprived of my cot, and on the other hand, they made a fun at my cost. When they were not content even with all this, they would say, 'Look here, Socialism teaches us we should equally shares pain and gain. Does it look nice that we should lie on the bed and he should lie on the floor? They put the cot against the wall and all of us, sleep on the floor; this was their favourite style way of merry-making.

"Bhagat Singh was of a jovial nature, while Sukh Dev was a bit serious. (Like) I am taking my meals in a hotel, Bhagat Singh would be passing by, having noticed me, came in, sat down opposite to me and started chatting. I could easily guess there was some motive behind this. While he went on talking to me, he also began to eat out of my *thali*. This annoyed me, as he had not even washed his hands nor had he say hello to me. He would rather say, 'I have come to share something important with you and let me say what I have to say.' And he continued to eat. Then he asked me, 'Would you like to have *kheer*?' I said, 'Yes', 'what's wrong with you? I like *kheer* very much but it is very costly.' He used to retort, 'So what! If you have to eat, eat in style.' After saying this, he began to order not only *kheer* also other dishes.

'I used to get peeved at this and if Sukh Dev was also here, I used to fare worse, because I had to obey the commands of both of them. Getting fed up with such doings of theirs, I too decided to revenge particularly on Bhagat Singh. One day, when Bhagat Singh was relishing his meal in the hotel, I slipped out on the excuse of getting a *paan* but instead of going to a *paan* shop, I went into hiding at a place from where I could watch the entire scenerio. Soon after finishing his meal, Bhagat Singh got upset when the hotel manager asked for money, which Bhagat Singh did not have. This was followed by a quarrel and when the situation took a more serious turn, I came back and rescued Bhagat Singh.

'In the same way, once when I returned to my room after shopping, Bhagat singh also came in and asked me as to what had I bought? As he looked at the oil bottle which I had purchased, he began to scratch his head saying, ' I know you will not give me oil, but I have been thinking of oiling my hair for many days. If you could spare a little oil, I shall be highly obliged to you.' When I refused to oblige him, he snatched the bottle out of my hand, uncorked it and poured the entire oil on his hand and extra oil flowed down to his ears. Then an argument ensued as if one was out to snatch something forcibly, what should one do? The discussion drifted to the Russian Revolution and Leninism and the subject of oil got sidelined.

Ultimately, Bhagat Singh said, 'Now let us forget all this: Everything has been discussed threadbare. Come with me to the *Halwai* shop, and let's drink milk,' where he had his credit account."

Bhagat Singh's first arrest— 29th May, 1927

Shahid Bhagat Singh under custody at Lahore Railway Police Station during his first arrest (29 May - 4 July 1927) in connection with 'Lahore Dussehra Bomb Case' (25 Oct. 1926) with Gopal Singh Pannu, DSP, CID Lahore

This photograph of bareheaded Bhagat Singh with an elderly Sardar, relates to his first arrest, while in police custody which was taken stealthily; the older person is S. Gopal Singh, DSP (CID) an expert in interrogating revolutionaries. Though Bhagat Singh did have a link with Kakori people, yet police had no solid evidence in this regard. The police had arrested him on the pretext of his hand in a bomb explosion on the occasion of Dussehra celebrations at Lahore in October 1926. Undoubtedly, it was the mischief of a government agent to incite communal violence, in which nine persons were killed and 50 injured. On 29th May 1927, when Bhagat Singh was coming from Amritsar side to Lahore as he came out of Lahore Railway Station, he was nabbed by the police and kept under custody in the Railway Police Station upto 4th July, when his father S. Kishan Singh got him bailed out for a huge sum of rupees sixty thousand as surety, which was somehow arranged

by his family courtesy two well wishers who stood surety for Rs. 30,000 each.

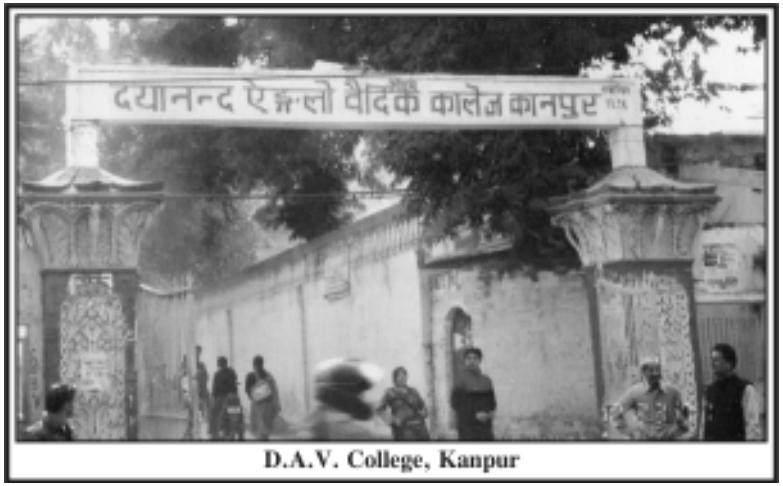
In his book "Why am I an atheist?", Bhagat Singh narrates that this arrest had turned him an atheist, when he was prompted to confess in order to save his life and on his refusal, he was asked to be prepared for being hanged. When he still remained unshaken, he was advised to recite His Name, which compelled him to think whether at such a critical time he should invoke some outside help or stand on his own feet and he decided to choose the latter. Of course, it is quite interesting that after his release, in his letter to his friend Amar Chand, he mentions thrice - *Parmatma hath dori* (All is in His Hand).

After his release, his father took him to his insurance office where he thrashed him with his hooked stick, which was nothing new. According to *Bebe Ji* (his mother) while his father beat him with the stick, he laughed and said, (*Shanti karo Bhaiya ji*. A family servant who knew about it informed his mother about this the same evening and upon Bhagat Singh himself reaching home, when his mother anxiously quizzed him, he laughingly said that he had not even been touched by his father.

He remained on bail for about six months, during which if at all he went out, he went to Lahore openly to supply milk so that the police should not have the excuse to cancel the bail bonds and forfeit the amount of security. His associates of course kept coming to his house to meet him. Besides others, Ghadrite Baba Ram Saran Das Talwar, also came to his village to meet him after his release in December 1927 and also joined the party. So much so when it was decided to throw a bomb in the Assembly Hall, he had tried his best to be given this task saying, "Since a young man like Bhagat Singh is the brain of the party and those like me are only the limbs, this task should be entrusted to me." The classic 'Preface' to his epic poem "The Dreamland" was also written by Bhagat Singh in January 1931, two months before his martyrdom.

5

DAV College Hostel, Kanpur



D.A.V. College, Kanpur

The four HRA members as per the college records —

(a) Shiv Verma s/o Kanahiya Lal Verma, age 18 years and five months, resident of Hardoi, admitted on 6th July 1925 and after passing 12th Class in Science subject, got into the next class, but left his studies in April, 1928.

(b) Jai Dev, son of Salig Ram Kapur, Khatri, age 16 years, resident of Hardoi, admitted on 9th July, passed 12th class in science subject and left in April 1927.

(c) Brahm Datt s/o Ram Ratan Mishra, Brahmin, date of birth 17.10.1909, resident of Kanpur, admitted on 13.7.27 and left the college in April 1928.

(d) Mahavir Singh s/o Devi Singh Rathor, age 18 years, admitted on 13.7.26 in the 11th class and left the college in April 1928.

Shiv Verma's background

Shiv Verma

He was born at village Khadeli (District Hardoi) on the banks of the Gomti river on 18th January 1906 in a traditional Arya Samajist, well to do enlightened family. His father, Shri Kanahiya Lal was a *Vaidya* (Ayurvedic physician) and his uncle, Shri Baldev Prasad a Tehsildar, who loved books and a number of literate co-villagers frequented his home library on Sundays. He thoroughly enjoyed narrating to them the brave deeds of old Rajputs, sacrifies of the freedom fighters of 1857, which influenced Shiv Verma greatly right since his early childhood. The newspaper *Pratap* edited by Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi was regularly received by his family, in which appeared articles about the Martyrs, Russian Revolution, Jallianwala Bagh massacre, and the like.

In 1919, when he was yet in he sixth class, the revolutionaries had called upon the youth through a poster to come forward to avenge the killings of Jallianwala Bagh. Shiv secretly removed one such poster pasted on the school's wall and brought it home. When the Police came to know about these posters, they raided neighbouring villages and seized the posters. Police came to their village in this connection and made searches; Shiv's father to be on the safe side secretly searched his son's satchel found the poster and, and destroyed it.

Both the elder brothers of Shiv, Vishnu Gopal and Jai Narain, were members of the local *Arya Samaj Sabha*, which he could not join because of his tender age. So he raised his own *Bal Hitkari Sabha*. He was unanimously elected its President. Its membership was open to the boys of all faiths under the age of eighteen. Their main activity was to run a library and also to encourage the youth to read biographies of national heros; some newspapers were also subscribed to,

including *Vande Matram* of Lahore and *Pratap* of Kanpur.

During 1920-21, his elder brother joined the Non Cooperation Movement and courted arrest following which Shiv left the school and took his place in the Congress committee, collecting donations from the people and helping the families of the *Satyagrahis* undergoing imprisonment. Peasant *Satyagrahis* had also joined the movement in large numbers hoping, that instead of being tenants at the mercy of *zamindars* they would themselves become the owners. Shiv was also looking after the District Congress Committee office. In 1923, when provincial Congress session was held at Lucknow under the chairmanship of Madan Mohan Malavia. Shiv also went there and related to Malavia ji about the atrocities committed on the farmers by their landlords, turning Malavia Ji's eyes tearful, which deeply moved Shiv. He requested Malavia Ji to get a resolution passed in the Congress session against the atrocities committed on the farmers. Malavia ji declined saying, "You are right, my son, and I fully sympathise with them but on any issue opposed to the Congress philosophy, no resolution can be passed in its session'. His plea was that since this oppression was carried out by the landlords on the landless farmers to keep them under their heels and therefore, Congress had nothing to do with it." Hence Shiv got thoroughly disgusted with the Congress. He was pained all the more over the mean conduct of the Congressmen undergoing imprisonment.

Jaidev Kapoor was his childhood friend. Both of them, after passing High school, had joined to DAV College, Kanpur together.

Shiv's first meeting with Azad

Writes Shiv Verma: "By the end of 1925 most of the members of HRA had been arrested in Kakori Case; only two persons whom the police had not been able to nab and they were under hot pursuit namely Kundan Lal and Azad. Instead of giving them some other party name we called them No. 1 and No. 2, respectively. So far I had met only No. 1.

"When one odd day Surendra Pandey whispered in my car that No. 2 had come and that I had to meet him that night, I felt an electric current passing through the whole of my body. I had formed an imaginary picture of Azad in my mind from the description of others. Upon Surendra's information the same picture seemed to come to life.

"By then Vijay and Surendra had come under the gaze of the CID and police was keeping a strict vigil on their movements. But till then I was free from this curse. Even then I began to keep a watch all around me that evening so that someone might not follow me precisely at that crucial moment. It was summer. I left the college much earlier than the appointed hour and to ascertain that no one was pursuing me, I made several rounds around. I sat in different parks, passed through desolate lanes and when I felt assured that I was alone, I knocked at the door of Radha Mohan Gokal at about 9 PM. Radhamohan opened the door and without uttering a word beckned towards the upper floor. There, on the open roof a young man was squatting on a mat in the moonlight waiting for us — he was dark complexioned, robust, a little shorter than average size, with small sharp piercing eyes and with deep pock marked face. He was Chandra Shekhar the absconding accused of Kakori fame, whose name had become a terror for the British imperial government and for whose neck the noose of the executioner of the British government was impatient. His revolver was stuck to his right knee; I felt as if some wild animal loyal to his master was asleep for a while knowing that his master was safe. It was my first introduction with Azad. This face to face meeting with him altered my mental image of him altogether. The image I had formed of him was fascinating but rare. It could be worshipped but emulating it or making it a companion was unimaginable. The new and live image of Azad was altogether different from my imaginary one: I found that Azad was a young man like us — tender, jolly, sociable but firm and steadfast.

"On seeing me he gestured me to sit on the other mat and welcomed me with a smile and then said 'Prabhat?'

"Answering with a brief, "Yes Sir", I sat on the nearby mat. "Vijay and Pandey might be coming soon, then we shall talk," he said. "I have heard about you and your work from Vijay. From the renewed efforts which you people have begun making togather the scattered threads and to build a new organization, it seems that all is not lost and perhaps shortly we will be able to do something"; Vijay and Pandey also came in while Azad was completing his sentence.

"In the meeting Vijay did most of the talking. Vijay told him in detail about the position of the party in the province, the search for old links, shortage of funds, arms and ammunition, liaison with Punjab and Bihar, the state of affairs of the party units in Kanpur, Allahabad and Benaras, proposed future programme, and so on: While Vijay was talking I was re-setting the faulty outlines of my imaginary picture of Azad and retouching it with lively colours. I saw Azad was not a lifeless idol for worship but a sure-footed traveller on the predetermined path — such a soldier who can smile in face of death and challenge it. The most important thing about him was that he was humane to the core who, in spite of being great, was not proud. After listening to the report of Vijay, Azad advised us to attend first of all to these four things — the search for old links and contacts, organization, getting clue of the old arms, ammunition and to search for the new sources and to establish contact with Bengal. He especially cautioned us against being hasty. He said that it would be suicidal if we push our comrades into the fire in haste. We would have to take every step after much fore thought and consideration.

"Azad had perhaps left soon after. In short I was deeply impressed with his natural brotherly behaviour."

Mahaur's observation

Regarding Azad's temperament Bhagwan Das Mahaur has said, 'As far as I have seen Azad, he never fell victim to pure emotions: Although with a handful of associates armed with *desi* pistols, revolvers and crude bombs, challenging the mighty British imperialism could very well be termed as a pipedream

and has often been so labelled but Azad or any of his associate had no illusions about it. With such meagre arms and handful of associates, what could have been done, they aspired to do just that much and never built castles in the air."

Bhagat Singh's arrival at the hostel

Recollects **Shiv Verma,** "A friend from Delhi wrote that some Punjabi gentleman was coming to Kanpur to meet Jai Dev and me: Since only a few days back we had joined the revolutionary party and very few people knew us outside Kanpur. Had it been Lucknow or Allahabad, we would not have wondered but who was this gentleman from Punjab? Our friend had written, "I had been introduced to him at the banks of the Yamuna, where I live. He is very close to you people. He wanted to come to Kanpur for some task. I gave him the address of both of you: He will himself do the rest of the introduction."

"On receiving this letter we were annoyed, 'Who knows whom he has sent after revealing all the secrets', we thought. Now, because he has already left Delhi, he would just be arriving. Therefore we searched our respective rooms. Excepting textbooks we removed all books and papers. Those days we lived in the red bungalow of the hostel of DAV College. Jai Dev had a spinning wheel of Gandhi *Baba* in his room. We removed this also being a symbol of national feelings. We had decided that if the Punjabi gentleman goes to Jai Dev first, he should not be introduced to me and if he comes to me first I would keep him away form Jai Dev.

"And one odd day, when I was completing my college work, I heard someone enquiring about my address from the neighbours. On hearing my name I came out. I saw a Sikh youth clad in dirty *Shalwar-Kameez* and wrapped in a blanket, standing before me — tall, fair complexioned, sharp piercing eyes, light beard on a beautiful face, unshorn hair and turban. "This is Shiv Verma", said my neighbour up on seeing me.

"The newcomer hugged me with open arms as if we were old friends. Then holding my hand he dragged me into my

room as if the room was not mine but his. It being a small room I had placed my bed on a cot outside the room. Without any hesitation and formality he sat on the bed and pulled my hand and made me sit besides him. "My name is Ranjit. I shall stay here for a few days. I have heard about you and Jai Dev from your friend in Delhi. I am also your fellow traveller." Then thinking for a while asked, "Do you know Vijay Kumar Sinha and Surinder Pandey?

"The behaviour of Ranjit, his sincere smile and smiling eyes had disarmed me in the very first meeting and thus it was impossible for me to mistrust him. All my defences had crumbled and I also replied with the same ease, "Yes, I know them." "Then ask both of them to meet me here," he said. Later, after a pause he asked, "Where is Jai Dev?"

"This time I told a lie: Gathering courage said I, "He has gone somewhere, he is not here."

"Ranjit guessed that I had dodged him. He visibly guessing it felt sad that I had not trusted him. He had brought Victor Hugo's famous novel *La Miserable* with him, which he began to read quietly — as if someone had put a sudden spoke in his laughter, his conversation and his frank behaviour.

"No doubt I spoke a lie but it pinched my heart: I could not stand the sadness of Bhagat Singh and I went to college pretending to send for Vijay. When Surinder was given the message of Ranjit he said that he was an old party man.

"It was time for lunch when I returned from the college: Jai Dev and I would usually go together to dine in the mess. Instead of ordering lunch for Ranjit in the room, I took him also along with me. There were only three of us for lunch in the mess at that time. Jai Dev was sitting next to Ranjit but the latter took him as some member of the mess and did not take much note of him. But when Jai Dev silently poured hot ghee in his curry ample full measure, he first looked towards Jai Dev and then looked at me with questioning eyes: Both of us laughed at his perplexity: 'Jai Dev?' We laughed still more loudly. Landing a heavy blow on my back Ranjit said, "You cheat" Then sarcastically added," It seems you carefully protect

your own people."

"For the time being your blow has made 'we' and 'they' equal." Said I.

"Fondling my back with his left hand he said," Let me caress your back; Now eat silently."

"Till Ranjit stayed with me Vijay and Surinder Pandey used to come almost daily. Hs had come here \to discuss the possibilities of freeing the Kakori accused Pandit Ram Prasad Bismil from the jail. After establishing contact with Bismil, he entrusted Vijay with the responsibility of finalising the plan and returned to Punjab."

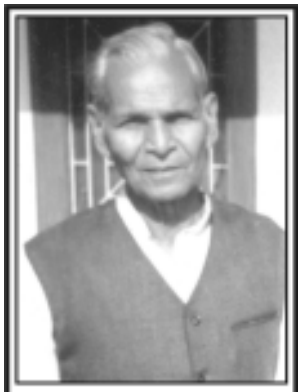
"Ranjit had left after staying for a few days and only then I came to know that his real name was Bhagat Singh. He had come to explore the possibility of freeing Bismal, in connection with which Vijay and Pandey had been coming daily to meet him. About two months after that, he again came to us and then stayed for quite some time. Meanwhile Vijay had maintained close contact with Bismal. Everything had almost been settled, but suddenly there was a setback.

"One of those days I was sitting very sad and dismayed since considering me a weakling, I was not included in the 'Free Bismal team'. Bhagat Singh sensed this and spoke to me affectionately saying, 'For a revolutionary, 'action' is not everything; though facing a bullet or getting hanged has its own glamour, yet by remaining anonymous and dedicated to the organisation, its propaganda and withering away bit by bit, is of far more importance, just as much more than the decorative stone fixed at the main gate, a brick laid in the foundation is far more important, in my view the role of the second type is far more commendable than that of the first.'

"As hinted above within a few days Bismal began to be treated too harshly upon which he expressed his deep anguish through a short poem, and when Bhagat Singh read it after taking it from Vijay's hand, he placed his hand on his head and sank in deep depression and quietly moved towards the river side. We waited for him till midnight and then after a long search found him as he sat like a statue. We brought him back; he walked

after us like a shadow. Next morning, however, coming out of depression he spoke to us, 'Our path would be closed if we bowed before defeat and instead of removing the obstacles we ourselves would become obstacles. Then he resumed his typical high spirits while talking about the organisation and propaganda, jovially singing and swimming, reading voraciously, relating the tales of the Ghadrites, Babbars as usual.

Bhagat Singh's bout of wits with Jai Dev


Jai Dev

Recalls **Jai Dev**: "One day I told the Sardar that I had to go to my sister's house in connection with a *Mundan* Ceremony. He said that he too would like to accompany me. In order to put him off I made numerous excuses, but after an hour's mind-boggling debate, he angrily said, 'I know you and I also know whatever you are doing, and I too am going where you are going.'

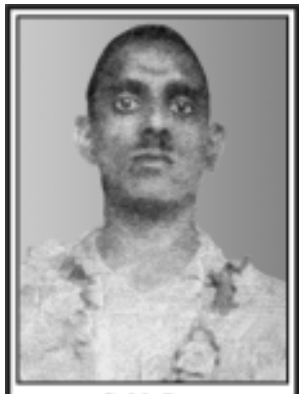
"I asked him angrily, 'Where am I going?'

"I will tell you everything and I also know that you have got two pistols. Give me one.'

We both stood exposed. Both of us were concealing the truth from each other though we were birds of the same feather. So we embraced each other tightly and our friendship became deeper. In fact, that day we had to reach the same place for same action.

Joins Sukh Dev

Reminisces **Shiv Verma**, "I had heard that there was a person known as 'Villager' in the party but when one day without advance notice the 'Villager' entered my room in DAV College, Kanpur, with a letter of Bhagat Singh, I instantly realized that the picture I had formed of him in my mind was false. I had thought that the 'Villager' might be a young rustic


Sukh Dev

from a village — illiterate or semi-literate at the most but a strongly built person with some deep marks of hard work on his face right from the childhood. He would not be fair complexioned either. But when the 'Villager' smiled without inhibition, frankly, handing over the letter of the *Sardar* to me I had to change most of my pre-conceived notions about him.

"Normal height and build, fair complexioned, very beautiful curly hair, big floating eyes, thoughtful tender face — 'Villager' might be anything but a rustic peasant, I could realize this on the very first meeting. He stayed in my room for several days. During those days Bhagat Singh also came for a day and then I came to know that the real name of the 'Villager' was Sukh Dev.

"Sukh Dev would burst into sidesplitting laughter on trivial matters: Often when none else would join him, he would laugh by himself to his fill; at first he laughed at my party name 'Prabhat'. As soon as he heard the name he laughed himself out of breath: When he slowed down a little I asked him what was there to laugh at in it.

"You scoundrel, you will work with revolutionaries and name yourself like a poet. If anyone asks you to recite some poem, you will look a fool. Were there no names likes Ram Prasad, Shyam Narayan, Lalita Prasad," saying this he once again burst into laughter.

"I said, "This is the inner party name the outside name is Pran Nath." "If you contend with a girl, she would talk to 'Pran Nath' (the dearest one!) with her *sandals*." He said winking.

"Before he would laugh again I said, "My third name is Har Narayan."

"'O, yes, this is a good name.' He said, 'Look this Har Narayan will do for outside and I don't mind 'Prabhat' as inside

one. But instead of calling you, 'Pran Nath' I may very well shoot myself.'

"Then suddenly he fell silent as if someone had applied brakes on his laughter: It was his nature to become serious all of a sudden. While laughing he would look like an innocent child and when he would suddenly fall silent while laughing, a strange pensive mood would engulf him, as if he would be in a very deep thought. It seemed as if some deep despair were eating him from inside: Meditating over various issues and problems for hours was his habit.

"The most cruel was his smile, behind which a mischievous scorn for everything was clearly palpable. His smile was an expression of his deep contempt and revolt against social evils, conventions and political differences. So much so that he would cover his biggest failures and shocks with his smile full of scorn."

"Whereas on the very first day meeting I was so much impressed by his laughter and skewed eyes, I inwardly laughed also at his ridiculous dress. He was wearing an *Aligarh* type *khaddar pyjama*, which was too dirty and also a dirty *khaddar kurta*, unbuttoned; it had slipped from his neck and hung well below his shoulders. He sported a shopkeepers' typical round cap on his head, which had got oily and had a layer of dirt from the edges upwards and looked like an oilcloth. But then he was wearing a pair of fancy shoes.

'He felt irked whenever anyone commented on his way of dressing or his lifestyle; possibly the nickname of a Villager had been given to him for his uncouth dress and queer behaviour. But hats off to 'Villager' who was so very careless about his own body and dress, but was very particular and fond of throwing feasts to his friends and cared a lot for their dress also. For example, once he brought for me a very decent *shalwar* with long Punjabi *kurta*, coat, *kullah*, turban and a decent pair of shoes. At his insistence I had to wear the clothes brought by him. Then he withdrew a step or two behind and inspected my turnout with great care. 'Now you look like a perfect Punjabi. Let's go out.'

'You should also change your dress,' said I.

'Are you trying to become my guardian? I will not change.'

'How would my going with you in this decent dress and your wearing dirty clothes appear?'

'Onlookers would think your servant is going with you.' and while saying this he virtually dragged me along to the crowded bazaar of Amritsar.

Shiv Ram Hari Raj Guru

Emerges Raj Guru

Shiv Verma recalls, "The party had 'sentenced' a man in Delhi to death: It was also decided that I should carry out the task with the help of another comrade. But it was not decided who the other companion would be. All the names from Kanpur were considered: The party did not find any of them suitable while some others were dropped for their domestic problems. After long deliberations someone suggested that there was a Marathi comrade in Benaras, who might be sounded. So I went to Benaras with his name and address.

Raj Guru was working as drill master in a Municipal School in Benaras. After school hours he would impart training in clubs, teaching fencing etc in a wrestling arena. He was the lathi-master of wrestling arena: I carried the mental picture of a tall and sturdy army *jawan* in my mind.

The next day when I reached arena (*akhara)* the training had come to an end and the trainee boys had left. Looking around I saw a man in a small hut busy in counting clubs and dummy wooden rifles. I thought he would be the *chowkidar* of the arena or a storekeeper. Going near I inquired about Raj Guru from him. On seeing me the man stood up saying tersely. "What is it please?" he asked.

"I want to meet Raj Guru."

"I am Raj Guru, tell me what do you want from me?"

Medium height and build, darkish unattractive long face, sunken cheeks with prominent bones. The picture I had formed of Raj Guru in my mind vanished in no time. What was before me was an ordinary youth in *khaki* shirt and shorts, who was also younger to me. After getting a cryptic answer to a symbolic word, there was no doubt that the man I was talking to was Raj Guru.

"I have to speak to you about something", said I.

Raj Guru closed the hut quickly and accompanied me. We went towards Motijheel area and sat facing each other at a desolate place. I looked keenly at Raj Guru's face: He was silently waiting for me to talk — he neither laughed nor smiled nor showed any curiosity. He did not show the kind of enthusiasm that one feels on meeting a new comrade. Perhaps those who undergo the hardships of the world in early childhood ripen before time and a sort of maturity, seriousness and terseness develops in them: Similar impression was made on me by the first meeting with 20 years old Raj Guru.

I told him about the decision of the party and asked him to join me in this job. On hearing the suggestion a smile ran across his hitherto impressionless face. "At last the party has considered me worth something", he muttered.

After silence for a while he asked, "Where and when have I to reach? In reply I gave him the address of the Science Block of the DAV College in Kanpur: I also told him, "Come as early as possible."

After about a week he came to Kanpur: By then we had been able to arrange only one pistol. Therefore Raj Guru had to stay in my room for two weeks. He spent this fortnight sleeping, all the time wrapped in a quilt.

Students would frequent my room the whole day during college hours. My ever-sleeping guest became a topic of gossip among my class fellows. Raj Guru would rise early at daybreak and slip into the quilt after completing daily chores. I had instructed the mess to send meals for the guest to my room. Both the times the servant would place food and drinking water on the table near the cot and shake Raj Guru saying, "Mister,

your meal had been laid." Raj Guru would reply, "All right" without uncovering his face. After the servant left Raj Guru would sit up and quickly eat the food, wash his hands in the *thali* itself and slip it under the cot and go to sleep again. I insisted much that he should go out for a walk saying that lying like this raised many questions among the people but he did not bother a bit.

In the long run all the Raj Guru's habits and traits changed: During last days of his brief life he was a changed man. Among us he lived only for about four years but during those four years his behaviour, ideas and eating habits all had undergone a sea change. Of course the "malady" of *Kumbkarn* like sleep did not leave him till the very end: No one could find it easy to wake him up even afterwards.

His past:

Shiv Ram Raj Guru was born in Khed, a town near Pune on 24.8.1908. 'Raj Guru' was the title of this family, which was conferred on his ancestors at the time of coronation of a claimant of the throne for anointing him. When Raj Guru was produced for the first time in the court of the Special Magistrate, the Magistrate had commented, "Your name is Raj Guru and how *about* these allegations against you?' Raj Guru quipped, 'My job is to instruct the ruler!"

As a whole his childhood had been miserable because he was barely six years old when his father died and thus entire family responsibility fell on his elder brother, Dinkar, who himself was a student of tenth class at that time; he had to join government service at Pune soon after. Shiv Ram was of a playful and wilful nature, but he was a fully obedient son of his mother. He helped his mother in household chores and fondly tended the marigold flowers grown in the house. He received his early education in the Marathi Primary School in the village. After his elementary education, he went to Pune to stay with his elder brother who got him admitted in the New English High School but soon after, considering English the *Mlechh Bhasa* (language of the cursed), he left that school,

though his brother keenly desired him to study English and seek a government job. Thus a serious dispute had arisen on this issue with his elder brother. In fact, the feeling against the foreign rule had taken root in his mind when he was yet in the third form and when Bal Gangadhar Tilak had come to his school.

Whenever he got a chance, he walked forty miles to his village. To strengthen his body, he took strenuous exercise and played robust games. His elder brother's advice to mend his ways had no effect on him; fed up with all this else Raj Guru made up his mind to leave his home and go elsewhere. He left his abode on foot without informing anyone and going without food he walked 130 kilometers in six days to reach Nasik where he spent a few days with a *sadhu*. From Nasik he reached Jhansi but did not stay there for long and went along with a Marathi co-traveller to Lucknow and after fifteen days, he reached Benares. He joined the Sanskrit School there. He wrote a letter to his brother about this, who started remitting to him five rupees every month but as he could not make do with this little sum, he got employed in the house of a teacher whom he had to serve like a slave and in return he was given just left over food.

Raj Guru shared his innermost thoughts with **Shiv Verma** a few days before his martyrdom: "Before coming to you people I had spent my nineteen years in this very world. But believe me Prabhat, not for once during that long period did I observe the beauty of this world even once. Every moment of my life was a burden. In that humiliating scenario the world was worse than hell for me. Then what magic is it that everything began to look so beautiful. Today I feel pained to leave all this."

"Are you afraid of death? Do you feel sorry for whatever you have done?" I put a straight question.

Raj Guru first smiled at my question and then turned serious. "At least I did not expect such a question from you, Prabhat! I am not afraid of death, you know it better. I was only sharing my experience with you. Poverty is a curse and

want of love is hell. This is the essence of the experiences of 22 years of my life. Some people call us poor and do not allow us to live in peace. Otherwise the world is very beautiful in itself. Who does not like to have a few moments of love in such a beautiful world! Should such a natural desire be called the fear of death?" I remained silent.

"I have recognized this truth by challenging the death," continued he.

"Later going from pillar to post for some time, he got employed as a drill master in a primary school, where he came in contact with Munishwar Awasthi, editor of *Sarves* published from Gorakhpur and joined the revolutionary party. The miseries of life had not let his playfulness and childlike innocence to blossom: But his core personality still had life therein and after joining the revolutionary family, his love, affection and his playfulness had come fully alive.

6

Azad at Jhansi

As Hari Shankar *Brahmachari*

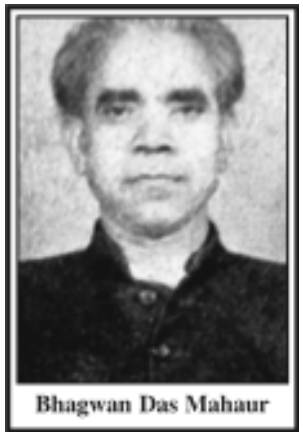
Whilst at Jhansi, Azad lived under the fond care of the family of Master Rudra Narain and though he stayed here and there also, the Master always firmly stood by him. He was a teacher in Saraswati Pathshala; Azad's photographs twisting his moustaches and the other one too were clicked by him at his house. He was a professional photographer and also an artist. Azad, in principle, was a staunch opponent of being photographed, because in the event of the police finding a photograph, ones' arrest became easier. Yet it so happened that one day, Azad had just come out after taking bath, when Masterji persuaded him to get photographed but fearing that he might back out so he at once photographed him while he was twisting his moustaches for the snap. Then one more photo of Azad was taken in a sitting position, with his wife and children so that one should think it having been taken with

some relative. After some time, when Azad realized his folly, he deputed his confidant Vaishampayan to get hold of the photographs and negatives from the teacher and burn them. When Vaishampayan approached the Master, he placed these before him but also pointed out that by doing so they would be deprived of a valuable legacy, and suggested to Vaishampayan that after ensuring their safety and secrecy, you could report their destruction. On the other hand, Vaishavpayan was not ready to tell a lie before Azad that he had burnt the photographs. Yet somehow, Masterji persuaded him to tell a lie once in lifetime on the condition that the photographs would be bricked and plastered in a wall and this would be known only to both of them. In this way the precious photographs were saved.

It was here at Jhansi that Azad met some of his life long associates, like, Vaishampayan, Sadashiv and Mahaur. All of them were students from to well to do families, who stood by Azad through thick and thin.

The Trio — Bhagwan Das Mahaur, Sadashiv Rao Malkapurkar and Vishvanath Vaishampayan

Besides others, three Jhansi boys Bhagwan Das Mahaur, Sadashiv Rao and Vaishampayan were closest to Azad and stuck to him through thick and thin. The memoirs of Sadashiv Rao and Mahaur narrated in their writing "Yash ki Dharohar", and Vaishampayan's in Azad's detailed biography are noteworthy.


Bhagwan Das Mahaur

Mahaur's revolutionary life had begun side by side with Sadashiv at Jhansi. He was born in 1910 at village Baroni of District Datiya in Madhya Pradesh in a Maharastrian family. When his parents came to Jhansi, his revolutionary life started under Shachinder Bakshi. He studied in Gwalior College also for some time. He had a very melodious voice, but his face being like Hanuman, Bhagat

Singh and he often exchanged spicy jokes. A particular Marathi song melodiously sung by Mahaur, was liked by everybody because of which he had come to be known as *Gunthley*(the theme of the song), so much so that even in police records he was mentioned as *Gunthley*. He has penned down very lively anecdotes about the days spent in Agra.

Sadashiv Malkapurkar

Sadashiv was born in 1908 in Bina District of Madhya Pradesh. His family was also Maharashtrian like Mahaur's: His ancestors once held large landed estate, which had been confiscated by the authorities because of the family's active role in freedom struggle; they also had shifted to Jhansi and he too joined the Party along with Mahaur. Sadashiv was the lone companion of Azad, whom he took along to his home during his village underground days; otherwise all the companions were forbidden even to talk about his family or home.

During her last days Azad's mother had lived with him at Jhansi and those days Sadashiv was her darling son, who was wanted by police those days being a Communist worker. However, he continued to take *Mataji* for a dip on *Amavas* at Hardwar according to her wishes despite his being an atheist and she had become so much enamoured of him that (according to Mahaur) she used to say often "had *Chandu* been there, would he have served me like this?" and she used to press him to marry. She used to allure Sadashiv, 'Get married, *Bitwa* (my boy). I will sing plenty of wedding songs at the time of your marriage. I remember many of them.'

As for **Vaishampayan** his ancestors belonged to U.P. but during his father's government service, he was transferred to Jhansi and they settled there. During his student days in local Saraswati Dhramshala, he came in touch with Master Rudra Narayan, through whom he joined the revolutionary

Vishvanath Vaishampayan

movement. From 1925 till a bare fortnight before Azad's martyrdom, he almost always remained with him and functioned as his right hand man.

A few days after Azad's coming to Jhansi, the needle of suspicion of the police pointed towards Masterji's house. Masterji suggested to Azad to settle at Dhimarpura, near Urchha stream, some distance away, as a priest of Hanuman Temple. This was not difficult for Azad as he had already had stayed at an Udasi Dera as a *Chela* (disciple).

Brahmchari Azad wore typical robes of a sadhu, shifted and settled there in style as Hanuman *Bhakt*. For his food, he would go to a nearby village, eat at some house and return. Soon after he began to give a discourse on *Ramayana* and thus devotees started coming from nearby villages to listen to him. He also started teaching the children of villagers. Thakur Malkhan Singh, of a nearby village, became his devotee and entrusted his *chaupal* (meeting place) to him for teaching the children. He also began to have his food with them. After some time Azad began to spend the nights also there because all the three Thakur brothers were part time employees of the Forest Department and often they all had to spend some nights outside on duty. They left the keys of their cash box with him along with their guns and cartridges. Azad made a good use of them for target practice. All this while, Azad had not ignored Jhansi. He kept going there every now and then and once he narrowly escaped being arrested in a dramatic manner but by these efforts he ultimately restored the Party organisation.

Back to Jhansi as Hari Shankar, *Driver*.

It so happened that a murder had been committed in Dhimarpura; and during its investigation by Police Azad thought it proper to go back to Jhansi to avoid police

questioning. As hinted above, Azad had kept himself in touch with Jhansi comrades all this while and he was fully aware of the developments all around following the Kakori case. The alert youngmen of Jhansi used to provide him important newspaper-cuttings and also kept him informed about the movements of the police. Police was determined to arrest Azad and Government had announced high rewards for getting him arrested. But he was then quietly receiving training as a driver cum mechanic in Bundhelkhand Motor Company. After learning driving, he got a motor licence issued in the name of Hari Shankar. Of this he made full use for Party work.

From memoirs —

Recalls **Mahaur**, "All of us were 17-18 those days and while reading novels, etc, we used to get highly emotional also, yet howsoever sympathetic we might get with the hero of the novel, and howsoever firm resolve we might have made to help the hero when in great trouble, yet in our day to day behaviour even if we may not have been 'stone-hearted' but were certainly insensitive: Just as when Azad was learning driving, once turning the car handle, he fractured his arm bone and he must have suffered great pain, and found it very painful even to sit and stand, but I had paid no heed to all this when once, hiding his hand in his shirt, Azad had come to my house to meet me: I was then standing besides the gate of my house talking to a classmate; Azad did not come near us and kept standing away waiting for me but I kept busy with my friend laughing and joking. Patience has some limit after all, Azad quietly went away. I kept calling him back, but he did not respond and then I felt that I had behaved very callously. Something must have compelled him to come to me yet I did not care to know whether he even got his food that day or not.

"When Azad came again the next day. I asked him, panic-stricken, 'Why had you gone back yesterday' He kept silent for some time, and then politely said, 'What could I do except going away? I am wearing dirty clothes, I have not had a bath

for many days and my body stinked, I could have come near you alone in this condition but not near your friend. Of course, I know you well; you did not mean to ignore me, still you should realise what is what and not keep attuned to self. Anybody else in my shoes would have felt so badly about this.' I felt ashamed very much, but he did not let me remain in this state of remorse and soon started talking about other things with his usual zeal and fondness.

"Azad had got quite thick with our family. Just like my friends Sadashiv, Vaishampayan and he too had begun to regard my house as his own. He had become a darling son of my mother. According to my mother, 'Hari Shankar alone is a decent boy. Sadashiv, Vishvanath and Bhagwan, are all uncouth': Plainly speaking he was very smart in keeping my mother happy. He was always on the look out for a chance that mother should ask me to do something, and as usual I dilly-dallied, he would promptly do the needful. Hence while I was cursed on such occasions whereas Azad was blessed, I used to feel quite annoyed with Azad. He became an ideal son of my mother, Sadashiv's mother and wherever he went, he became a blue-eyed boy. In my mother's view, if anyone had all the virtues, they were in her pet Hari Shankar.

"My family believed in *Sanatan Dharma*. Therefore Azad strictly adhenced to its rituals while in my house. My mother used to admonish me for my 'Christian and Aryasamajist' ways. Through Azad's discourse, in her presence I had to listen to the tenets of my faith and my duty towards it. Azad never took even water in my house without washing his hands and feet. He never drank water out of a mud pot but always in copper or brass pot and if he had to take cold water out of a pitcher, he took it secretly in my room. However, when he was at Master Rudra Narayan's house, he often snatched full kettle of *khichhri* (rice-lentil mix) out of his Bhabi's (Masterji's wife) hand and ate the entire lot in one go.

"For feeding Azad, we had to steal *chapattis* from our homes but my difficulty here was that I was served meals by my mother while sitting in the kitchen. I could not myself touch

the basket. The inner circle of the kitchen was demarcated and this 'line of control' was the *Lakshman Rekha* for me, which could not be crossed. The *Sanatani* kitchen of my house was out of bounds for me; so much so that even my revolutionary zeal could not transgress the 'Mother-line' in her absence too! Therefore, I could never dare to cross the 'line of control' to steal some *chapattis* and if there was a way out, it was only that I should ask for more *chapattis* in my plate than I needed actually and then go to my room carrying the plate with me, so that I could eat some and save the rest for Azad. Of course, Azad had suggested this way out but when I suggested it to my mother she was furious.

'Hence once I was given no food, since I insisted on dining in my room, but I stuck to my resolve, 'There is lot of smoke in the kitchen. As I have trachoma, Doctor has advised me to avoid smoke. I have not to get blind. Whether you give me food or not, I don't care. I will not eat sitting in the smoke.' said I. This plea was also suggested by Azad. Soon after when Azad came home, mother complained to him and as per our script, he rebuked me and also gave a good lecture on preserving the sanctity of the kitchen. When in reply I quoted the Doctor, Azad "thoughtfully" revised his "stand", 'Of course, the eyes' problem is very serious and, in fact Mother, your kitchen is always full of smoke and eyes are sure to be affected. Doesn't matter. Let him take bath before and then take his food out of the kitchen. One has to observe one's faith also, after all." Mother also inwardly desired a *via media* so that Azad should not consider it irreligious, staunch Brahmin, ideal son, Hari Shankar, as he was in her eyes. Hence mother felt as if gods had sanctioned it and the way was opened for me to steal *chapattis*. Moreover Mother was rather pleased all the more to find that my 'appetite had increased'.

'Sadashiv and Vaishampayan also smuggled *chapattis* from their respective homes. Viewing Azad filling his tummy in this way, I once got too upset and said, 'We take our food of all kinds in great comfort and you have to take stale and dry

chapattis and pickles.' Azad retorted, 'You are a fool. I get three types of *chapattis* from three houses, besides one brings mango pickles, the other brings lime and you bring bitter gourd pickle, which I relish very much. I also get vegetables of different kinds. I enjoy food of so many varietes. What else do I need?' 'But In Master Rudra Narain's house you can eat to your heart's content along with all of them. Why not make regular arrangement there?' said I. He replied, 'Don't get into this tangle or later now. You do not know that it is not desirable to dine with anyone everyday. Of course they serve me food with great respect. But if I start partaking of food there daily, it would not look nice and the host's attitude would also alter. You will not understand all this yet. I relish my food with a lot and feel happy.' I was about 17 or 18 at that time and Azad was about 20-21. Hence whereas all three of us could afford to be "boyish" Azad on the other hand had attained the faculties of a mature grown up person.

"As Azad had become the elder son of my mother, so it was enough for me to seek Azad's permission to return late at night due to party work. I used to tell my mother on such occasions that I had asked Azad. Afterwards when he confirmed my statement to my mother, she believed fully that I did not go out to make some mischief but to study. This right also had been obtained by Azad by assuring my mother to keep a sharp eye on me. Sometimes I remained away throughout the night with Azad and on such occasions in the morning, Azad would tell me, 'Just wait. Let me go first.' He would enter my house and enquire as to where I was. Mother would angrily complain that I had been away from home throughout the night and had not yet returned. He would then enact the drama of getting very angry and say, 'It is very bad remaining away at nights. Why don't you pull him up, mother?' "But then "thoughtfully" Azad would say that perhaps it was in connection with examination that he may have spent the night with some class fellow and his friend's parents did not let him return alone. May he be at Hari Das' place in Sipri Bazaar. I would go and find out.' Azad would leave on his

cycle, 'find' me, and 'take' me back home and entrust me to my mother, saying, 'Mother, 'Was I not right in my guess, this guy was fast asleep on a *divan* in Hari Das' house. Had I not reached there, he would have slept till noon and you would have been extremely worried here. Then turning to me, would say 'Oh my God!' You have had no feeling at all for your mother? If at all you had to be absent from home, you could have at least told your mother. Who would have stopped you? Study seriously, no one can stop you; yes you are at fault. You must have informed your parents. At least if you had told me, I could have come here and informed mother who would not have got worried then. You devoured *puris* there and slept comfortably and mother went without food throughout the night. How cruel you are!'

"Thus mother would not then chastise me, and whatever was required to be said by me, Hari Shankar had said and rebuked me on her behalf. Such dramas were enacted off and on. To start with, I could hardly suppress my laughter but gradually I was able to restrain myself. Later on, when I won the first prize for my role in the college stage, I placed it at Azad's feet saying, 'You are my Guru in acting too.'

"By the way going with Azad on cycle was like inviting trouble. If anyone got ahead of him by mistake, it was his bad luck, as he could not bear a cyclist going ahead of him and had no peace till he overtook him, and later saying, 'The rascal has been left behind gasping.'

In the meanwhile from Punjab, Sukh Dev, Bhagat Singh and from Kanpur, Vijay Sinha began to come here from time to time. This was the period of rejuvenation of the Party. In Kanpur centre, joined Ajoy Ghosh, B.K. Datt and Gaya Prasad from Kanpur and around, whereas Bhagat Singh and Sukh Dev also got closely associated. This was the period when knowledge was gained about the past revolutionary movements from books and exchange of views by brainstorming sessions, besides picking up the scattered strands in the Punjab, U.P., Bihar and other provinces, to restore the organisation on sure footing.

A crisis for Bhagwati Charan

During 1927-28 days, the revolutionary party was trying its utmost to get the jailed accused of Kakori case freed and expected finacnial and physical help from the Punjab; but on the other hand, the Party chief, Prof. Jaichandra Vidyalankar, who was not only the respected professor of the party cadres, but their *Guru* also, was taking no tangible step in this regard while Bhagwati Charan Vohra on the hand was very restless and had started saying that if things continued to drift in this way, he would be compelled to form a new party on his own for achieving the end. This had reached Guruji's ears also; Guruji knew that Bhagwati could very well do all this and he felt that his *Gurudom* was under threat.

In the meanwhile to raise money, when *Guruji* approached Sushila Didi to contribute for the cause, she offered her gold bangles, which her late mother had given her for her marriage. Coincidentally, *Guruji's* niece's marriage had been fixed those days. He suggesed that the bangles could be weighed, and he would pay the price of gold as contribution on her behalf and bangles could be used for his niece's marriage. Bhagwati heard this and said angrily, 'Why so? If *Didi* can do without bangles, why can't Professor's niece? This shall never happen.'

'So *Guruji* began whispering insidiously all around that, 'I have come to know from the most reliable source that Bhagwati is a C.I.D. man.' He continued this vicious propaganda uninterruptedly, so much so that when Bhagat Singh met him at Calcutta in 1928, he 'cautioned' him saying. 'I learn, Bhagwati is also here. Be careful….' Ironically enough while Vohra family was being thus maligned it was also entrusted with the highly hazardous task of ensuring safe exit of Bhagat Singh and Raj Guru from Lahore following Sounders' murder.

It is a pity that such a far-sighted person and great thinker, who was the author of a writing like the Manifesto of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha in April 1928, Manifesto of HSRA in December 1929 and "Philosphy of the Bomb" in January 1930 had been hounded out and that too during the reorganising

phase of the party during September 1928. Resultantly, because of this mean act of *Guru Ji*, Bhagat Singh himself was on the horns of a dilemma, because his soul was not prepared to believe this vile propaganda nor was Sukh Dev's insightful mind ready to hold Bhagwati guilty without any basis.

Feeling fed up to the brim, Sukh Dev entrusted to Yashpal the job of carrying out a through search of Bhagwati's house, because Yashpal and Durga Bhabi had prepared together for Prabhakar examination in 1925 and his routine visits Bhagwati's house continued as usual: He searched every nook and corner of the house but found nothing of suspicious nature, which assured Sukh Dev of Bhagwati's innocence.

Bhagwati on his part was desperately planning on his own to get Bhagat Singh and Datt freed and in order to raise money, *Naujawan Sabha* activists such as Sher Jung and associates were prompted to loot the government treasury from a train at Ahmedgarh. He had also, in cooperation with Yashpal, prepared a scheme to blow up the Viceroy's train, but in the absence of the Party approval, he had deferred it: This situation continued till November 1929 when he and Azad met at Kanpur.

7

From 'Republican' to 'Socialist Republican' Delhi: 8-9 September 1928

Ferozeshah Fort (Delhi)

These youngmen deeply felt that the goal of political independence alone would not be enough to arouse the peasants and workers unless, along with political, social and economic equality was also assured lest it may simply mean a mere change of masters. In this crucial meeting, Punjab was represented by Sukh Dev and Bhagat Singh, UP by Shiv Verma, Jai Dev and Vijay Kumar Sinha, Bihar by Phaninder Ghosh, and Rajasthan by Kundan Lal, who all were present in the meeting. Azad could not reach because of his eye trouble, but his approval for the new approach had been obtained from him in advance. Initially Azad had some reservations regarding the new policy, but after listening to the comrades who had gone to invite him, he too yielded.

In the light of the functioning of earlier revolutionary movements no scope was to be left for *Dada*, or a supremo: Azad had simply been made the Commander-in-Chief of the Military Wing, but the overall control was vested in the Central committee. It seems necessary here to say that one of the secrets of all the achievements of the Party was that all the decisions of the Party were taken by the Central Commitee collectively. For instance, when Bhagat Singh's name was not approved for bomb explosion in the Assembly at first, Bhagat Singh had to accept this against his will and later on, under the pressure from Sukh Dev, he was given an opportunity to appeal against the decision of the committee, and after that the Committee had agreed to send him, Azad did not want this at all, but he too had to submit before the decision of his comrades. Besides, Azad, though personally opposed to offering for arrest after the explosion by Bhagat Singh and Datt, had to submit before the decision of the majority.

The Members of the Central Committee were — Bhagat Singh and Sukh Dev from Punjab, Shiv Verma and Vijay Kumar Sinha from UP, Phaninder Ghosh from Bihar and Kundan Lal from Rajasthan and the seventh member was Azad. Sukh Dev was made Incharge of the Punjab, Shiv Verma of UP, Kundan Lal of Rajathan, Phaninder of Bihar, Azad, Commander-in-Chief of Socialist Republican Army and Bhagat Singh and Vijay Kumar were assigned the task of coordination and propaganda.

Other decisions

1. Yogesh Chatterji, accused in Kakori case to be freed while being transferred from one jail to the other.
2. When Bhagat Singh had suggested an assault on Simon Commission, it was felt that bombs were necessary. Thus it was decided to secure the services of a bomb expert, through Phaninder, at Calcutta. Phaninder promised to find one during the Calcutta Session of Congress in December 1928.
3. At the instance of B.K Sinha, who had said that there was a great shortage of funds with the Party, and as offered by Phaninder it was decided to carry out a dacoity in Bihar; Bhagat Singh and Azad were tasked to meet him for the purpose in end September.

Discussing about the proposal to send Bhagat Singh there, it was felt that if he went there in the present guise of a Sikh, he would be spotted by everybody. Therefore, he was to get his hair, beard and moustaches cut, but Phaninder had proposed that he should retain the moustaches because it was not the custom that side to shave off the moustaches. Consequently at the time of his return to Lahore he had got his hair-beard cut at the party headquarters in Ferozepore.

Trial run — Saunder's assassination.

Simon Commission was sent by the Imperial govt. after a period of ten years of working of the reforms of 1919, to reassess the capability of the Indians for self-governance, but not even one Indian was included in the Commission, which raised a storm of protests in India. Right from its landing at Bombay in February 1928 and later at every town, large number of people spontaneously 'greeted' it with black flags and banners proclaiming "Simon Go Back".

When the Commission visited Lahore on 30th October 1928, *Naujwan Bharat Sabha* was most actively involved in mobilsing the people for a vociferous protest. Elderly leader Lala Lajpat Rai was leading the demonstrators. Hundreds of residents of Lahore had blocked the road coming out of Lahore railway station. Police was failing in making a way through the crowd. Then the Police Supdt. Scott with a *danda* in his hand and angrily advancing towards the crowd, ordered 'Lathi Charge'; the Asst. Supt. of Police, Saunders was also wielding a baton along with him.

Yashpal, who was then present near Lalaji, has written that *on the umbrella, which the* youngman had kept over Lalaji, some lathis blows *were also struck* because of which Lalaji was hurt. It is worthy of note that on the bare body photograph of Lalaji some zigzag marks on his body could have possibly

Injured Lala Lajpat Rai

been caused of the wires of the umbrella. The contemporary media reports did not indicate any visible serious injury but there is no doubt that Lalaji's death, which occurred on 17th November, was attributed to the lathi blows by the public at large, though it might had been the result of trauma also. Despite all this, Lalaji had made a fiery speech same evening in a very large public meeting, in which he had said that "blows given to me, would prove to be the last nail in the coffin of the Empire."

Lala Ji's death at the hands of the police incited widespread feelings of revenge in Punjab; although these youngman had sharp differences with Lalaji, because Lalaji's politics had turned communal and at the time of the 1926 elections, by way of a taunt, posters containing an English poem ridiculing him were got printed and distributed during one of his election meetings, whereupon Lalaji's supporters had even thrashed Bhagat Singh and his associates. Despite all this, when they realized that inspite of these ideological differences yet in view of the fact that nation's elderly leader had lost his life because of the lathi charge and above all Government, not to speak of any action against the policemen, had not even expressed regrets. It was thus decided to take revenge upon the Police Supdt. Scott, who led the brutal *lathi* charge; Raj Guru and Bhagwan Das Mahaur too were called to Lahore. Final touches were given to the plan in the second week of December.

On 16th December, in the Bradlaugh Hall Kakori Day was observed the and while returning from there, Bhagat Singh upon reading the wall posters about a movie highlighting the atrocities committed on Black Americans, extracted from Mahaur the ticket money which Azad had given him for that night and next morning's meals, and compelled him to spend that money to watch the movie and on return to their place, he

extolled to *Bhaiya* Azad the merits of the film in such a way that he gave the money for meals.

J.P. Saunders

It was decided to shoot Scott on 17th December, in the afternoon at 4 PM when he comes out of his office, Bhagat Singh and Raj Guru carrying pistols moved up and down in front of his office. Jaigopal had to signal to them about Scot's exit and Azad was to keep standing in the compound of adjacent DAV College to ensure Bhagat Singh's and Raj Guru's safe exit. By chance, Scot happened to be on tour on that day, so when Saunders was seen coming out at the appointed time on his motor cycle, Bhagat Singh said to Azad that he did not appear to be Scott — meanwhile Raj Guru fired at Saunders and then Bhagat Singh also fired eight bullets at him which killed him on the spot.

> [According to **Sukh Dev**, actually Bhagat Singh had to kill Scott and Rajguru was only to protect Bhagat Singh (if pursued) and Azad had to protect them both: Rajguru did not recognise Scot; but when Rajguru had fired at Saunders, it was necessary for Bhagat Singh also to do so.]

Recalls **Mahaur**, 'Raj Guru told me same evening that his bullet had hit Saunder's head and he collapsed then and there. He also complained that Ranjit simply wasted eight cartridges.' Inwardly Raj Guru appeared to be very sad that evening. We told he should be happy, and his reply was, 'Saunders was a very handsome young man. How would have his family felt?' When I praised his fine target shooting as to how he hit a bullet at his temple and felled him, his reply was, 'I had aimed at his chest but the bullet hit his head.' **In fact, his bullet had actually hit the chest since according to Saunder's post mortem report and there was no wound on his head.**

Then, both of them, after shooting Saunders, raced towards DAV college compound but Saunder's orderly, Havildar Chanan Singh, ran after them, and did not stop even

when Azad sternly warned him. At one point of time Bhagat Singh was running ahead of Raj Guru. As Chanan Singh's prime target was Bhagat Singh, he had overtaken Raj Guru and was about to get hold of Bhagat Singh when Azad shot Chanan Singh's groin and he fell flat. The White rulers, instead of attending to their wounded loyalist, put the dead Saunders in the car and took him to hospital and his faithful orderly was put in a Tonga by some students who took him to a nearby dispensary from where he was immediately referred to Mayo hospital, but he breathed his last on the way. As per the post mortem report his death was caused by excessive bleeding; had he been sent to hospital immediately and instantly operated upon, his life could have been saved.

That evening those youngmen had no money even for their meals. Azad borrowed ten rupees for dinner. That night was spent by Azad, Bhagat Singh and Raj Guru in the house, which a few days earlier Sukh Dev had rented and housed his mother there so that it should look a normal house.

Durga 'Bhabi' and child Shachi

Comrades exit Lahore

According to **Yashpal**: "On the one hand there was the suspicion about Bhagwati being a spy, on the other hand, was the dependence on him for crucial assignments; it was something which I could not swallow, though the subsequent developments proved that Jai Chandra had made adverse propaganda against him which was totally baseless. Naturally, it was Sukh Dev, who as Punjab party incharge had to manage the safe exit of these three comrades from Lahore. For Sukh Dev, there was a *well on one side and a ditch on the other:* Since without the cooperation of Bhagwati family, this could not have been done and this was to be accomplished against the Party mandate that no contact may be had with the family…."

Willy nilly, Sukh Dev got five hundred rupees from Durga Bhabi, bought tickets and hi-fi dress, shoes, etc, and on 20th December very early in the morning, Bhagat Singh left Lahore posing as an Army officer with Durga Bhabi as his wife and Raj Guru as their servant by a Calcutta bound train and this ensured their safe exit from Lahore, whereas Azad left for Delhi on 25th in the company of Kishori Lal, besides Sukh Dev's mother and sister.

8

A turning point

Yatindra Nath Dass

As per the decision of the party in its 8-9 Sept Delhi meeting, in order to make up the deficiency of bombs a Bomb expert was to be found by Phaninder during Calcutta session and after a careful search; Jatin Das was approached who had an eventful post. Jatin, son of Bankim Bihari Lal, was born at Bhawanipur, Calcutta on 17.10.1904. He could enjoy his mother's love and affection only for ten years. He passed the tenth class in 1921 and joined college, but his heart was in the freedom of the country. Therefore, he left college and became a Congress activist. Those days there were horrible floods in Bengal and chaos prevailed with untold sufferings. He joined other youngmen and did relief work for the flood affected day and night.

Afterwards he was sentenced to four day's imprisonment for violating law, which encouraged him all the more. He left his home and hearth and started living in the Congress office, but his father wanted him to go in for higher education: So he stopped supporting him. Jatin started giving tuition for ten rupees per month and managed. Those days once again he was arrested for violating law and jailed for a month. In 1922, being accused of the boycott of foreign cloth, he was again sentenced to 9 months' imprisonment. Living in hellish conditions there, he fell ill; on return, as desired by his father,

he rejoined college. In spare time, he worked for the Congress. Jatin had also got thorough training in manufacturing bombs along with martyr Rajinder Lahiri of Kakori fame, in Daksheshwar in a bomb factory in Shobha Bazaar of Calcutta. Martyr Ram Prasad Bismal also had to come to Jatin for training, but could not. At the time of Police raid there on 10.11.1925, Jatin was not present there and hence escaped arrest.

Because he was an expert in bomb making, his new associates of HSRA, after careful thought selected Agra as the centre for preparing bombs and right from January 1929 upto the end of March, almost all the party men remained there continuously. Manufacturing of bombs and the training continued. Also a lot of books were procured and a library was set up. The books contained detailed accounts of revolutionary movements of India and the world, the memoirs of the leaders of such movements, by going through which they gained a lot, which was accompanied by heart to heart discussions as well.

The party centre at Agra was established with due care and elaborate planning. Two houses were hired there, one in *Hing Ki Mandi* where the bomb factory remained working and the other was in the upper storey of a house in *Noori Mohalla*, as residence. Those days attempts were also made to free Yogesh Chatterjee.

Recalling his first visit to Agra for this mission, **Mahaur** recalls, "One day Vaishampayan came to me at Gwalior and took me along to Agra, where our revolutionary group was living in a house in Noori Mohalla. When I entered the upper storey house with him, someone examined me with a torch from head to foot and then the door was opened and as soon I entered the room, the barrel of a big revolver 'welcomed' me. When I diverted my attention from the revolver and looked up, a youngman's vigilant eyes were staring at me. This youngman was non else than Bhagat Singh. It was about 11 PM and he was on guard duty. In the dim light of the kerosene oil lamp, I could barely recognise him who was

known in the party as Ranjit.

"In the adjoining room were some youngsters, asleep in a row on the floor: Newspapers and *dhotis* were all their bedding. The noise of our arrival disturbed the sleep of one or two occupants, of whom I recognised one even in the misty light. To our misfortune Vaishampayan and I had been badly drenched because of rain. I removed my wet clothes and held in my hand and was looking for some place to spread them to dry up when Bhagat Singh promptly took my clothes from me, and after wringing, spread them on a string. It was very cold and I was shivering. Bhagat Singh asked me if we were feeling hungry. Before I could reply, Vaishampayan said 'It is O.K. and even if we were hungry, what can be done right now? We will see it in the morning. Presently let me burn some coal so that we could feel warm.'

'Next morning I met everybody one by one. Azad, Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and V.K. Sinha were already known to me. Among others, whom I met for the first time, included BK Dutt, Shiv Verma and Jai Dev. At about 10 AM I noticed that Bhagat Singh, V.K. Sinha and perhaps Sukh Dev were huddled in a corner talking in undertones. Off and on they pointedly looked at me though avoiding my eyes from which I could guess that they were talking about me. It was but natural as I was a new arrival. According to the Party code, my joining their conversation or even listening to it was forbidden, even though they were talking about myself. Willy nilly I overheard Bhagat Singh saying 'Yes, Darwin was correct; perhaps he is the *missing link*.' On hearing this, Sinha laughed loudly. When I turned my eyes towards them quizzically, my eyes saying, "Yes, boys I understand". Sinha was still laughing, whence Bhagat Singh had turned serious while beckoning me in a very decent way to join them.

"As a matter of fact, I was now to be given a new name now in the Party. It was customary in the Party, just as Azad was called 'Pandit Ji' and Bhagat Singh was called Ranjit. Sinha suggested 'Hanumanji' or some such name when Bhagat Singh, suppressing his smile said that the name should

be such as might not lead to one's recognition. I was overwhelmed by his charming style, which won me over. Finally, at the suggestion of Bhagat Singh, I was given the name of 'Kailash'. Then started bathing session. First of all Bhagat Singh and Azad massaged each other's back and then massaging their hands they tried to floor each other.

"Sinha and Bhagat Singh were fond of singing and in this matter, I too deserved some esteem because I was fairly proficient in classical music. This talent brought me closer to Bhagat Singh, who otherwise regarded me a rustic wrestler, who had nothing to do with knowledge and philosophy, because these things were not my cup of tea.

"Bhagat Singh appeared to be from a well off family. It was not so easy for him to go about in worn out clothes and poor food was all the more distasteful. So, howsoever hard he tried, he could hardly swallow such food. The relative ease with which people (say) like myself, who came from relatively mediocre families and could make do with hardly eatable food and wear tattered clothes, Bhagat Singh could not do that so naturally, though it was incumbent upon him as part of his duty to do so calmly; I had judged this in the initial two or three days at Agra.

"The Party was ever short of money. Therefore eating *purees* etc. in the bazaar was out of question and after buying provisions, food was cooked on the hearth at home; deprived of pots and pans as well lentils were cooked in the lower part of a broken pitcher, in which we added salt and chilies according to our cooking code — sometimes more and sometimes less — but that *haldi* had also to be added, no one had a clue. Hence the lentils cooked by us looked so uninviting, that they drove away ordinary appetite at first look and howsoever hungry one may be, it was not a child's play to swallow it with eyes open. To cap it all there was the lack of eating utensils and the *dal* was served in a big earthen bowl and we sat around it to swallow our burnt or half-baked uncouth *chapattis*.

"One odd day as we sat down in a circle to eat, Bhagat

Singh mischievously smiled and said, 'Just see I will show you how the *Nawabs* of Lucknow enjoyed their meals in style.' He delicately tore a small morsel from his *chapatti* so that the chapatti may not be hurt or his fingers may not be sprained. He had taken so much time to tear the morsel in which time we had swallowed two or three big morsels. Again with delicate movement he 'exposed' *dal* to his morsel just nominally, so that it should just touch the *dal* and he put it in his mouth in *Nawabi* style. Then he moved his jaws hardly three four times and drank water out of an earthen pot to push the morsel down his throat. While standing up, he said, "What a sumptuous meal! My God! And wiping his face with his handkerchief, he moved as if he had partaken of food to his heart's content. That day very Bhagat Singh went somewhere and managed to bring back a few rupees so that they all could take tolerable food. Some cheap pots and pans to cook and dine were also bought.

"During those days too Bhagat Singh as usual used to talk of revolutionary ideology which was beyond my reach in any case. For me it was enough to know that is that we were struggling to free our country from the British and our course of action was like that of the Sein Finn of Ireland that is guerilla fighting, but since from the educational and intellectual angle, I regarded Bhagat Singh my Guru, I had to pretend that I was following him, in which I fairly succeeded."

Adds **Vaishampayan**, "While living in Agra, our time was generally spent in discussing national problems, reading serious books, besides playing cards in spare time or visiting Taj Mahal in moonlit nights to enjoy its beauty except Azad who had gone there only once and he used to say that, 'What the viewers of Taj felt, I am unable to stand.' On the other hand, Bhagat Singh, mesmerised by the charm of Taj, got lost in his dreams and sat there quietly for hours. But then once Raj Guru gave the 'proof' of being a desperate lover: We had just returned from Taj when he sat down with a pen and paper to scribble and after a few moments he declared 'I have written, I have written a couplet and without a response from any one, he recited—

Ab tak nahin tha malum ishq kya chiz hai
Taj ko dekh kar mere ishq ne balwa kiya
[Had not known till now what love was
Viewing Taj my love turned riotous]

Upon hearing (balwa kiya) 'love turned riotous' Vijay Sinha jumped laughing and Dutt kept staring at his face but Bhagat Singh very calmly passed on his revolver to Raj Guru and said, 'Hold this and either shoot me or promise never to write poetry.'…

"All of us used to cook food turn by turn; while Bhagat Singh evaded it and instead of cooking, he was ever ready to wash clothes. Sukh Dev also joined him sometimes. While washing, also sometimes songs were also sung, in Hindi, Marathi and Bengali. "Marathi song '*Raja kutha gambla, sakhiai ton paran*' (A great king of noble soul) had sweet words and a melodious tune and Mahaur was quite adept in singing it: was a favourite song of most of the comrades and they also used to join Mahaur when he sang it. Among other singers were, Bhagat Singh, Jatin Das, Sinha and myself too.

"Sometimes Bhagat Singh sang '*Mera rang de basanti chola*' and Punjabi popular classic '*Heer*' also: Though he had no idea of the intricacies of music, his voice was melodious. Amongst us it was only Sukh Dev, who had absolutely no interest in songs. Azad loved music, but instead of the singing style, he was more interested in their text. Often he sang the first lines of a Bundelkhandi folk song and then asked me or Mahaur to complete the rest of the song. In his last days, when he got entangled in complexities, he used to ask us to sing something, which soothed his mind. …Many a time, remembering Bhagat Singh, he used to mumble 'Mera Rang De Basanti Chola'. Oftentimes, after a long silence, he would get nostalgic and say 'How nice were Agra days!'

"In heart of hearts he never considered Bhagat Singh simply his associate, but his very life and breath; he loved Bhagat Singh not only from his heart, but from his soul too.

He did not want to send him for the Assembly action at any cost, because he knew that he would be arrested on the spot and be hanged yet he yielded only because he believed that Bhagat Singh's court statements would take their Party at the peak at National level and the people the world over would come to know that the Indian revolutionaries did not lag behind in making supreme sacrifices for freedom, yet he could not help feeling that the consequent loss would be irreparable.

After Bhagwati's demise in May 1930, talking about the fate of the Party Azad had revealed to Vaishampayan, "*Bachan*, during the Kakori days, I was not mature enough, but later on when the Party established its new identity, among the new associates, Bhagat Singh was a priceless gem. I knew that with his departure, Party's ideological core would be weakened and so *did* it happen: But when I met *Bapubhai* (Bhagwati), I saw a ray of hope. I felt confident that our Party would again be able to stand on its feet and days like those of Bhagat Singh would come back and the old bloom would gradually return. Like the Assembly Bomb episode, attempt was made to throw a bomb at the Viceregal train also and once again Bhagwati, through the 'Philosophy of the Bomb', likewise won us nationwide acclaim, but his sudden martyrdom hurled me back to utter despair."

Who would be held and how?

Shares **Mahaur** — Once when Azad, Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev, Raj Guru, Batukeshwar Dutt, Shiv Verma, Vijay Kumar Sinha, Dr. Gaya Prasad, Vaishampayan and others were chatting in the topic sprung up certainly not for the first or last time, as to 'Who would be nabbed how?' and what would one do on being held and what would be the punishment awarded to him by the Government which became a 'free for all' affair!

This, Raj Guru Sir, would be caught napping; as he goes to sleep even while walking. His eyes would open only in police custody and then he would ask the guard, 'Have I been really arrested or am only dreaming?'

"Batukeshwar ji would be nabbed while looking at the moon in a moonlit night. On being caught, he would say to the policemen, 'Does not matter, but moon is really beautiful.' Vijay Kumar and Bhagat Singh would be arrested in a cinema hall. Upon being arrested they would say to the policemen, 'Yes please, if you have arrested us, so what? Let us watch the rest of the film at least.'

Panditji would be nabbed while hunting in some hillock of Bundelkhand, because of the treachery of a so-called friend, in reality a police informer and after getting injured *in the encounter*, he would be captured when unconscious. He would be sent directly from the encounter spot to Police Hospital in Jhansi and would come to know on regaining consciousness, that he has been arrested; the punishment under section 121, hanging.

"Azad simply laughed it away. Bhagat Singh mockingly said, "For you, *Pandit ji*, two ropes would be needed, one for your neck and the other for your heavy tummy.' Azad retorted, 'Look here, I am not a game for the noose. You may be fond of it. Rope, etc. is only for likes of you. So long I have this (pistol) with me, no one on this earth can nab me alive.'

"It is noteworthy that out of this prattle, two of the forecasts proved true; about Raj Guru and Vijay Kumar Sinha. Raj Guru was arrested while in sleep and Vijay Kumar, in a cinema hall. It would not have been a surprise, however, if Bhagat Singh and Dutt had not offered themselves for arrest in the Assembly Bhagat Singh too might also have been arrested in the expected way. But what was said about Azad too could also have happened; in fact Azad had a very narrow escape from such a trap; It so happened that one of Azad's close friends, Thakur Nahar Singh had a servant, Mohana, who was a very cunning fellow. He suspected that Azad was an absconder. He was on the lookout for a reward by getting him arrested. Fed up with shortage of money, once while Azad was staying there, he was persuading Thakur to get

him arrested. It was past midnight, and both of them were confident that Azad was in sound sleep, but actually he was awake, as he had digestive trouble those days. Azad heard all this; all this while he kept lying pretending to be asleep, but got alert. He quietly got up in very early hours of the morning and took hold of his pistol, cartridges and a jug of water and moved out on the pretext of answering the call of nature; because of loose motions this aroused little suspicion.

"Azad threw away the jug on the way and changing his course now and then, he walked all the way to reach Agra early morning. His associates were surprised, as he had to stay there for a few more days. On hearing him, it escaped the lips of one of the associates, '*Pandit ji*, you could have spent two cartridges.' Azad said, 'You are mad. A slave country like ours abounds in such like betrayers, of whom how many of them would we kill? We ought to mind our own business, but if actually there was a compulsion, I would have fired but I feel contented that I did not have to do that. Possibly, after their financial difficulty was over, they would have repented for their misdeed.'

Attempts to free Yogesh Chatterjee

Narrates Mahaur, "We had planned to free *Dada*, when, in order to shift him, he would be taken out of the jail under police custody for transfer to the other jail, we would attack the guard on the way and free him. He was supposed to be transferred from Agra to Lucknow jail, as per our information by the ten PM train that night and the plan had been devised accordingly. But as against the first information, he in fact was to be escorted in a late night train. Dutt had been entrusted the duty of keeping a watch at the Railway Station. He immediately informed us. Therefore Sinha sent Raj Guru in advance to Kanpur where *Dada's* train had to be changed for Lucknow and since there was no connecting night train, he had to be kept overnight at Kanpur. Raj Guru had been sent to establish contacts at Kanpur and to find a place where *Dada* could be kept after freeing him. I, Azad, Bhagat Singh,

Vijay Sinha, Dutt, Shiv Verma, Sadashiv and the rest left for Kanpur by 10 PM train. But as no arrangement could be made for a house in Kanpur and whilst we were stranded at Kanpur Station, Azad's pocket was picked; he lost his purse and also driving licence. In this way the entire plan flopped. Sadashiv and I were strolling on the platform carrying the instruments for cutting the iron chains. Azad told us with a very heavy heart, 'Let us buy tickets for Agra and leave. Call back Raj Guru also.' We just remained mute spectators when we saw Yogesh *Dada* was on the move, surrounded by policemen, jingling his heavy chains. We kept looking at him with heavy hearts. As our Agra bound train was about to steam off, Azad told us to hurry up, and called back Raj Guru also. Bhagat Singh sat calmly throughout in the train journey to Agra but as soon as we entered the house, he began to cry bitterly and kept crying for quite some time. Nobody could fathom all the way how deeply hurt he felt.

Above all else, during Agra days, the members had an opportunity to read revolutionary literature extensively and intensively too, as good books were available on history of revolution, Socialism, Communism, Marxism-Leninism, Anarchy, Gandhiism, which most of them read carefully and discussed among themselves, differed on some points and agreed on others, and kept looking for new ways, which helped them gain insights into the historic significance of their times.

A new vision

Agra phase led to a new realisation that though the party had become 'Socialistic' but only in name since till date its sole 'achievement' (Saunders' murder) was solely an act of revengeful liquidation of a notorious tool of the oppressive rulers which had been common in the past right since the killing of a notorious judge by Khudi Ram Bose and Prafulla Chaki in 1908.

Looking back they were dismayed that the martyrdom of even eminent revolutionaries like Ram Prasad Bismil,

Ashfaqulla, Rajinder Lahiri and Roshan Singh did not move the common man the way it should have.

Hence it was felt that we must adopt a new line of action that goes beyond sacrificing their lives like earlier martyrs, with which the peasants, workers and people in general sympathise spontaneously.

Coincidentally, or otherwise the entire country was in turmoil during those days due to imminent threats to their livelihood and liberty both: The Government was bent upon imposing Industrial Disputes Act to crush the labour unrest caused by large scale retrenchments besides drastic cuts in their wages, it aimed at banning even the holding of meetings by workers in the factory premises:

And plus Public Safety Act, modelled on notorious Rowlett Act 1919, prescribing severe penalties even for most peaceful public gatherings.

To add insult to the injury these measures were proposed to be thrust upon the whole nation through the agency of their 'own' elected representatives, namely, the Honourable Members of the Central Assembly. Accordingly, since these Bills were proposed to be debated in the Assembly in early April, it was decided to hurl one or two completely harmless bombs on the empty space from the visitors gallery in the open space down below exactly following the members vote count when the speaker would be about to announce the result of voting; Also simultaneously handbills on behalf of H.S.R.A. would be scattered in the hall explaining the purpose of their act. Secondly, Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt who were assigned this task shall peacefully offer themselves for arrest shouting 'Inqilab Zindabad' 'Down with British Imperialism'. And finally a detailed statement was also drafted to be made by arrested comrades in the trial court, which was like a Manifesto of H.S.R.A. Besides, in view of the imminent large police raids following the explosion, all precautionary measures were to be taken by 3-4 April to pre-empt the arrest of comrades here and there.

It is noteworthy that during the course of discussions on

the plan at Agra some members had opposed offering for arrest after the explosion, of which Azad was the leading exponent. They were of the view that why should they *offer* themselves for arrest and in so far as giving of statement was concerned, the same statement could be made during the proceedings after being arrested. They also assured that they had prepared a plan, after assessing the situation, to save the comrades who would throw the bomb, but since majority was in favour of offering for arrest on the spot, so Azad also gave in.

It was also decided that the party's Central Committee shall meet during the first week of April at Delhi to give finishing touches to the scheme; Shiv Verma and Jai Dev Kapoor were sent to Delhi in advance to make the necessary arrangements.

9

A miracle!

Central Committee had already decided that a bomb be dropped in the Central Assembly at a vacant spot, when both, Industrial Disputes and Public Safety Bills had been voted upon and result was about to be declared. The object of the explosion was only to highlight the widespread resentment of the people, and that too without killing or injuring any one; it was aimed at "making the deaf hear".

Since day one, Bhagat Singh wanted to throw the bomb himself because it was his belief that he would be able to put forth his Party's stand in the Court more effectively than anybody else. Though his view was correct, everyone knew that, if arrested, he would surely be sentenced to death, being involved in murder of Saunders, therefore, even agreeing with his arguments in principle, the Central Committee members present in the Delhi meeting were deadly against his being given the task. After a long discussion by the Central Committee meeting at Delhi decided to name another comrade to replace Bhagat Singh. Bhagat Singh also had to yield before the majority, justs as Azad had done earlier.

Somehow Sukh Dev had not been able to attend this Delhi meeting of the Central Committee, in which the above decision was taken. Next day, when Sukh Dev came to Delhi, he was furious. According to him only Bhagat Singh, could place before the court the political angle of the bomb explosion. He had talked to Bhagat Singh about this and he had compelled Bhagat Singh to do it himself. When even in a recalled meeting of the committee Bhagat Singh could not succeed in bringing around the members of the Committee to his point of view,

Sukh Dev had another meeting with Bhagat Singh the same evening.

This time Sukh Dev's attitude was very rude; while talking he uttered some harsh words also, "You have got proud. You think the party depends entirely on you. You are scared of death. You are a coward." His argument was, 'When you were sure that none except can put across the viewpoint of the Party, why did the hell you let the Central Committee take this decision?"

Sukh Dev also referred to the *Ghadrite's* Lahore conspiracy case citing comments of the Judges about Bhai Parma Nand that 'Being the Director of the Party, he is a coward and in matters of risk, he pushed others and has been saving his own skin.'

"For you also similar words would be written." He frowned as he looked at Bhagat Singh.

More emphatically Bhagat Singh rebutted his charges, Sukh Dev got all the more rude. When Bhagat Singh said that he was insulting him, his reply was, 'I am doing my duty towards my friend.' Bhagat Singh then pressed for another meeting of the Committee in which Sukh Dev kept mum, but the Committee had to bow before Bhagat Singh's stubbornness to assign him this task.

Sukh Dev left for Lahore that night without meeting anyone. According to Durga 'Bhabi', when he reached Lahore next morning, his eyes were swollen. Perhaps he had cried at no end. That day he did not talk to anyone. Although he did not show either any weakness or shed a tear but deep inside he stood shaken beyond measure He had staked the life of his best and dearest friend though of course for achieving the party aim.

He poured out his heart in a writing penned while he was himself in police custody whose opening lines read:

> 'That day's (8 April, 1929) happening had caused a turmoil in my spiritual life, the world had begun to look desolate to me. The joys of the outer life had gone away from me. I began to say that no one was left to be

called mine. Who belonged to me had gone, what is left is the work, in which there is no sense of belonging. I talked, but my mind was ever somewhere else. I laughed but there was no smile at all therein. I kept myself occupied with work, not in the form of a human being, but like a machine. It seemed that whatever belonged to me had been lost and whatever I was left with, was nothing.... I can't argue with him, can't push him away from me, but he has gone, very far, so far that I can't reach him. He can never come back now. This had worried and depressed me and my heart got lost in looking for him.... Whichever direction I looked at, his handsome face, his roving eyes, his brilliant thoughts, haunted me incessantly.... My love, I had thought, it was foolishness, but no, it was an intoxication, a madness, a love, which I could understand only when I was myself in Police custody." (as he himself was arrested soon after.)

According to **Shiv Verma**, "When the Central Committee decided finally that Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt would go to the Assembly to hurl the bomb, all the other comrades except myself and Jai Dev, were advised to leave Delhi and to proceed to Jhansi. When Azad had to depart for Jhansi and I went to the railway station to see him off, he said to me on the way, "Prabhat, only after a few days they would become the property of the country and only their memories would be left with us. Till then look after them like guests, and take utmost care about their comfort. He talked throughout about Bhagat Singh and Dutt. He did not want to lose Bhagat Singh at any cost, and had bowed, with a heavy heart before Bhagat Singh's stubbornness but he felt very disturbed deep inside after pushing him into this action.

A personal note

'The responsibility for preparations was entrusted to Jai Dev Kapur and Shiv Verma. I had the opportunity to meet both of them quite often; once they both stayed in my house on 1-2nd October 1969 in Guru Nanak Engineering College, Ludhiana: Jai Dev had then narrated to me, "I was given the responsibility that I should take a house on rent in Delhi and also arrange for the entry passes to the Assembly and since the landlords let houses only to married tenants, I had to tell the landlady Smt. Mukandi that Bhagat Singh was my elder brother, who had been recently married and he would bring *Bhabi* here in a few days: Since we had to vacate the already rented house immediately we were trying desperately to find an alternative.

"As for our food, we had befriended a milkman and a *halwai* from whom we could get milk etc. on credit for which payment had to be made at the end of the week or month, while one had to pay immediately for meals at hotels. For obtaining the entry passes for the Assembly, I posed as a student of Political Science and got acquainted with a Member of the Assembly so that the much-needed passes could be got issued. I also began visiting Assembly so that I could have an idea of the internal scenario."

The action plan had been chalked out meticulously. Interestingly, when Bhagat Singh was just going to leave the house, he noticed Jai Dev's worn out shoes which impelled him to exchange with his own hi-fi boots which he had worn while leaving Lahore after Saunder's murder; then he looked at his wristwatch, which too he removed and handed it over to Jai Dev. This watch had been gifted to Bhagat Singh by veteran revolutionary Sachindra Sanyal. Luckily enough after Jai Dev's demise his kin bestowed all the fond care to both these articles as sacred relics and continue to display it with legitimate pride and presently Ranjit Kapoor his grandson (named by him after Bhagat Singh) is equally enthusiastic in preserving this legacy.

The photographs of both the comrades were a 'must' for display in the press, etc., that too instantaneously in the same appearance as was to be on the time of the action, which was bound to find place in the newspapers. Both of them had got these photographs clicked at Kashmere Gate, Delhi, from photographer Ram Nath on 3 April, who had appeared as witness (No.177) too before the Tribunal. Their negatives had

also been obtained and many prints had been made subsequently, which appeared in many posters and journals from time to time. Bhagat Singh had got photographed himself wearing a hat possibly to conceal his identity and also because he had to carry out the action with his hat on. Bhagat Singh's dress was khaki shirt with pointed collars, khaki knickers, designer check gabardine coat of dove colour and stockings too of same colour while B.K. Dutt had khaki knickers and shirt and light blue coat. We might think odd regarding their going to the Assembly wearing knickers, but those days knickers were commonly worn by the educated people just as pants (pantaloons) are common today. That is why in the precious photograph of Bhagwati Charan with Durga Bhabi and Shachi in their lap, Bhagwati is wearing knickers. In fact Bhagat Singh was wearing knickers with coat even in winter at the time of Saunders's assassination too.

An interlude

Vohra family comes to Delhi for a meeting with Bhagat Singh.

Bhagwati, Durga 'Bhabi' and Sushila 'Didi' met Bhagat Singh in the morning of 8th April, 1929, near the Old Delhi Railway Station.

It so happened that when Sukh Dev, after sacrificing his dearest friend to make the Assembly explosion, returned to Lahore, he felt that Bhagat Singh should meet Vohra family and Sushila Didi right now as it would never be possible after that. This was a strange feeling for Sukh Dev who was not sentimental by nature, yet he arranged their meeting as imaginatively as Bhagat Singh Raj Guru's exit from Lahore.

According to **Durga Bhabi**, "A day before bomb explosion in Delhi, I was in Sialkot where Bhagwati had sent me a message through some one to come back to Lahore immediately and board the night train from there to reach Delhi next morning, where he would be waiting for us at old Delhi Railway Station. Upon reaching Delhi, we all went to a nearby garden where both Sukh Dev and Bhagat Singh were present.

The meals we had brought from home was enjoyed by us all. Then Sushila pierced needle in her finger and put a *Tilak* mark on Bhagat Singh forehead with her blood. We had absolutely no idea about what Bhagat Singh was going to do. We only knew that he had to go for some 'action'. Where did he go after leaving us, we had no clue.

"We then boarded a tonga, while Sukh Dev was going along on his cycle. We moved directly towards Assembly Hall and moved around in side lanes. When the bomb was thrown in the Assembly, Police was seen rushing about in all directions. We stopped our tonga off the road, after which we saw Bhagat Singh being escorted in a police van. My son, Shachi, who was in my lap, shouted loudly on seeing Bhagat Singh "*Lambe Chacha*" but I placed my hand on his mouth. Bhagat Singh also could not restrain himself, he too turned his face towards us, but meanwhile the police driver accelerated the van, which vanished in no time and we returned."

The explosion

Bhagat Singh | Batukeshwar Dutt

Where to throw the bomb and from which place, for this purpose Jai Dev had already studied the inside of the Assembly chambers (now Lok Sabha chambers). He had also surveyed the site by prolonged sitting in the visitor's gallery. One day before the voting he had accompanied Bhagat Singh to the site and explained the whole situation; he had arranged three passes and after escorting the two comrades to the visitor's gallery he took away the passes. These passes had been obtained through

a Congress MLA. After coming out Jai Dev burnt these passes. The entire members cast their votes on the Trade Disputes Bill. The Chairman Vithal *Bhai* Patel was about to declare the results when a loud crashing sound was heard on the backside of the Treasury Benches. The Chamber was filled with smoke: There was a chaos all around. When the smoke cleared a little it was seen that the hall which was then full of members and spectators was now empty. Only three people were in the hall, Chairman Patel, Motilal Nehru and Sir James Crier a member of the government side. They stood like statues on their seats. And in the visitor's gallery there were two youngmen whose slogans were resounding in the Assembly hall '*Long live the proletariat', 'Down with the imperialism', and 'Long live the revolution*' while throwing leaflets into the Assembly hall. They could have easily escaped in the melee but they did not.

After the incident the police came with all its might. A sergeant came forward and arrested both. Once again the Assembly hall echoed with slogans. The first line of the leaflet read:' To make deaf hear it needs a forceful sound." But the government had become deaf on purpose. It had a majority in the Assembly. The 'Trade Dispute Bill' was passed but it did not dare to present the Public Safety Bill. It was promulgated through an Ordinance. In the leaflet the action of the revolutionary party was justified quoting Valian the French rebel and proposed that the people's representatives should return to their electors and prepare the public for the future struggle.

Shiv Verma and Jai Dev dismayed:

Unfolds **Shiv Verma**: "Following the arrest of Bhagat Singh and Dutt, both myself and Jai Dev felt a great burden on our minds while going to sleep; it seemed as if we had returned after sacrificing our two comrades. We closed our eyes without sharing a word and as soon as I shut my eyes, the jail scenario began to swirl before me. Till then I had not seen the jail; I had heard only the heart-rending stories about jail life.

"How a night before, all four of us were together and

today two of us have gone away from us that too forever. 'We would not be able to see them again in our lifetime.' Thinking of this I felt like crying but realising that 'Shedding tears is a weakness' I got up quietly to control myself and suppress my feelings and sat down near the window which opened in the deserted street down below.

"Jai Dev too was lying, like me, with his eyes shut. After some time he opened his eyes and found that I was not in bed. He had no difficulty in locating me and upon finding me sitting quietly near the window, he came to me and seating himself close to me he muttered, 'Shiv'.

"Now nature has fitted in the human body two spies, who despite all the efforts to hide something they do reveal it. After restraining for a few moments, a few tears dropped down my eyes. At that time two similar spies on the other side got restive to reveal their tale; Jai Dev's eyes too got tearful; when the life long associates depart, something like this does happen. That night we sat quietly near the window for quite some time and the spies kept on relating their tales again and again.

Media craze

Following the explosion, the Party made maximum use of the print media since here after the Party's had begun to make newspaper headlines: While no newspaper was ready to touch its posters issued after Saunder's murder, with a tong now the leading newspapers were vying with one another to publish their poster of 8th April and the news about the explosion at the earliest.

For instance when, Durga Das the Delhi press correspondent of the Calcutta based *Statesman*, wanted to send a telegram in this connection, the Telegraph Department had refused to accept it on the plea that all the Calcutta lines had been reserved for government business; thereupon Durga Das, using the quick wit of a journalist, sent the telegram to the London Office, asking them to relay it to Calcutta so that he could steal a march over other newspapers and he succeeded.

Closely viewed these insightful, young men, without

giving up bombs and pistols, proceeded non-violently and disarmed their rabid critics. Firstly they did make use of the bomb and the pistol, but not for killing or injuring anyone and secondly instead of running away from the crime scene, laid down their arms and offered themselves for arrest and above all in the trial court, instead of denying, they owned their action boldly for which they had been arrested, all this like a *Satyagrahi*, Their conduct after the incident and their statement before the court made head lines in the newspapers, which won the hearts of their countrymen. So also they came out of the margin of the Indian politics and occupied the centre stage at the cost of the high profile Indian politicians. Afterwards when they went to jails and adopted the death defying tactics of hunger strikes they succeeded in becoming people's darlings for months and years.

Court proceedings.

Bhagat Singh and Dutt, during the hearing of the case, exploited the forum of the court to the maximum by expounding through simple language the concerns of the teeming millions. The best part of it was that while both the accused owned up the action taken by them but emphasised that no action can be termed bad good or without taking into account the motive behind it. Just as when a thief or a robber kills anyone, he is called a murderer, but when a soldier kills someone for the defense of his country, he is regarded a hero.

From the legal point of view, their argument was that when the intention behind an action is not to harm a human being, as was evident; how can he be held to be guilty for attempt to murder? It is noteworthy that right from the beginning to the end, Bhagat Singh pleaded his case himself, while on behalf of Dutt, Asif Ali, Advocate, had appeared. Possibly, Bhagat Singh had sought Asif Ali's advice about some legal points, but the arguments in the court were advanced by him himself. In this regard the biggest proof of his success is the High Court Judge's comment about Bhagat Singh in the appeal against the Sessions Court's decision, that '**Bhagat Singh is a sincere revolutionary I have no doubt, that is to say, he is sincere in the illusion that the word can be improved by destroying the social structure as it now stands and substituting for the rule of law the unrestrained will of the individual.'**

Hence, those, who never feel tired of saying that the British rulers had been calling people like Bhagat Singh as extremists and terrorists, is misleading. Even in the very long and detailed judgement in the Lahore Conspiracy Case, the character of this party was held to be revolutionary, though some of their actions were described as acts of terrorism. The statement made by them before the Court, was the elaboration of the poster thrown in the Assembly on 8th April, through which they had dwelt on the aims and objects of the Revolutionary Party.

Excerpts: from the Statement — "We stand charged with certain serious offences and at this stage, it is but right that we must explain our conduct.

In this connection the following questions arise:

1. Were the bombs thrown in to the Chamber and if so why?
2. Is the charge, as framed by the Lower Court correct or otherwise

"To the first half of the first question, our reply is in the affirmative...

"In our reply to the next half of the first question, we are constrained to go into some detail to offer a full and frank explanation of our motive and the circumstances leading to what has now become a historic event.

"When we are told by some of the police officers, who visited us in the jail that the Viceroy Lord Irwin in his address to the joint session of the two Houses described the event as an attack on no individual but against an institution, we readily recognized that the true significance of the incident had been correctly appreciated.

"Our message to the people at large was that for members of the institutions like this Assembly there are two alternatives, either they should go on putting their stamps of approval blindly on the decisions made by Government and in case they

disagree, then without caring for it the same decision may be put into effect, then such an institution would only be a deception and nothing beyond."

About Violence-Non-violence, they said, "In the matter of loving humanity we are second to none. As against any malice towards anyone, we are madly in love with humanity. We regard human life so very precious that we have no suitable words to describe its sanctity. The only object of ours was to open the ears of the deaf and to caution the careless and arrogant rulers. Everyone has felt like us. It is a matter of great regret that a respected leader of 30 crores of people was attacked by an ordinary police officer like J.P. Saunders and met with his death at his mean hands. This national insult was a challenge to young men.

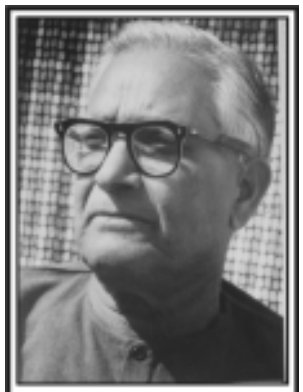
"The elimination of force at all costs is 'Utopian' and the new movement, which has arisen in the country, and of that dawn we have given a warning, is inspired by the ideals which guided Guru Gobind Singh and Shiva ji, Kamal Pasha and Raza Khan, Washigton and Garibaldi, Lifayate and Lenin.

"We do not believe in bomb and pistol. Revolution for us means that the system based on injustice should be changed. Therefore there is dire need of basic and real change and those who feel the need of this change it is their duty to build society on socialistic foundations. Until and unless this is done and till one nation continues to exploit another nation, pain and misery would continue and talk of peace and tranquility would continue to be just a hypocrisy and dishonesty. For us socialism means a society which is free of exploitation, in which the workers should have their ascendancy and different countries should be equal partners of global fraternity, only then can world peace be established permanently. To achieve these objectives, we are ready to bear all tortures with a smile. We have decided to offer our lives at the altar (doorstep) of Revolution that for achieving a great and precious target, we are ready to pay any price — "Long live Revolution!"

In order to spread the core message of their statement in all the nooks and corners of the country, all the means of

communication had become active. Till then the revolutionaries had been the soft target of criticism by everybody and the activities of these young men were termed *pungas* (self-imposed trouble). Almost all the eminent leaders were never tired of preaching that these hotheads were creating hurdles on the way to the slow and steady march towards progress and provide an excuse to the government to say 'that the Indians were not yet fit for self-governance. Therefore, government need not be hurry in this regard'. The so-called proponents of *Ahimsa* never missed a chance of calling the revolutionaries *Violent and Inhuman*. But this explosion had falsified these allegations and consequently, the command of political activities passed into the hands of these selfless young men.

An aside: Bhagat Singh's teacher worried:


Udai Vir Shastri

Udaivir Shastri, Sanskrit teacher in National College, Lahore, loved Bhagat Singh also because he was quite brilliant in this subject, though Shastriji had nothing to with his ideology. He hailed from U.P. and his in-laws were from Nahan State and his brother-in-law, Sher Jung was a revolutionary and had participated in the Ahmedgarh train dacoity. After closing down of National College, Shastri went back to his village in U.P.; when he had read in the newspaper that Bhagat Singh had been arrested in the Assembly Bomb Case, which was being investigated under the supervision of Mian Jagdish Singh, Magistrate who was very close to Shastrji and his wife was the friend of Shastriji's wife. Thus, on the pretext of a courtresy call, he went to his Delhi house, whereupon his wife told him that he could meet him only at the breakfast time in the morning. Therefore Shastriji joined him in breakfast next morning.

Shastri thought it better to broach the subject indirectly. He mentioned about his remaining busy day and night and when in reply he referred to Bhagat Singh, Shastri Ji made a sarcastic comment about likes of Bhagat Singh, but Jagdish Singh interrupted him, 'You are totally unaware about these youngmen. They are like angels. We should partake their foot wash. Only they are entitled to become the future leaders of the country. You call them mad but what I have seen in them and understood, I had said just that. Those youngmen are of the view that though they may have to kiss the noose sooner or later, it makes no difference to them. While talking they seem quite indifferent about their own fate.'

"Shastriji was inwardly overjoyed to hear praise of his favourite disciple, but his fear of their being tortured during police custody did not leave him. Shastriji said, 'Come what may, Police does not exercise restraint in torturing every accused in their custody.' Jagdish Singh interrupted him and said, 'Such like accused are made of a different stuff. There is no question of torturing these boys. They themselves admit that they have thrown the bomb..., stating that 'we have welcomed these black laws in our own way.' They had not concealed anything nor told a lie, which testifies to their boundless courage and sincerity."

Shastriji concludes, "My mind was unburdened of tons of anxiety and I returned to my village feeling light."

To Jhansi

It was Azad's foresight that even during his prolonged stay at Agra he had not ignored Jhansi and whenever he found an opportunity he paid a visit to Jhansi. Bhagat Singh often jokingly said, "It seems *Panditji* has got some beloved there" and Azad's reply used to be, "My beloved is my pistol, which is always in my pocket." Only a few comrades in the Party knew the place where he used to stay at Jhansi but regarding his stay at Rama Nand, driver's place was hardly known to anyone.

It was because of this precaution that when Phaninder

Ghosh turned an approver, he knew about Master Rudra Narain's house, where he had also taken the police, but Azad was not then living there. Another associate of Azad, Ram Dularey who had been summoned to the court as witness No.288, had met Azad during 1928 and it was his house, in which Azad used to stay, between January to April. Besides upon arrest of any comrade, it was Azad's principle that the places about which the arrested comrade knew, should be vacated immediately, and there was no question of distrust of any kind in this. So much so that after the arrest of Bhagat Singh, when the newspapers spread rumours that he had revealed inner secrets to police, Azad read the news and he asked Vaishampayan to tell Mahaur and Sadashiv to go somewhere for two or three days. Vaishampayan could not help saying that 'if Bhagat Singh could turn an approver, our entire thinking is hollow'. Azad's reply was — "You are mad indeed. It is not the question of Bhagat Singh's distrust, but that of discipline and principle; even if I am arrested tomorrow, all the places known to me shall have to be vacated and the arms shifted to some secure place.' Vaishampayan turned emotional and was about to say something when Azad interrupted him and said, 'You fool, one day you too would be caught because of your naivety and put in a cell in the Andamans. Get going and finish the work.' Incidentally, by then Mahaur and Sadashiv had already gone somewhere.

Azad's humanity

Shiv Verma has written — "Regarding former comrades turning approvers Mahaur had observed that in each and every trial of revolutionaries in the past some of the participants turned approvers had stabbed their erstwhile comrades in their backs. Yet I have not come across a single such instance amongst all the comrades whom Azad had brought into the party or someone who had been personally close to him. I daresay that those who tread the path of revolutionary patriotism intellectually or idealistically might betray their ex-comrades which is not that uncommon, but Azad's love and friendship

sunk deep in the innermost psyche of his associates which ensured their steadfastness. Mere dreams of revolution and patriotism may turn phoney in a critical scenario, but the heart deep endearment and brotherly love, experienced by those close to Azad was too steely to give in."

On 2nd May, 1929 there was an unusually big gathering of comrades at Jhansi. Besides Azad, Mahore, Sadashiv and Vaishampayan, Raj Guru and Kundan Lal too had arrived. The moment I reached there, I (Shiv Verma) was surrounded by them all, since they were longing to hear the firsthand account of the unfolding of Delhi-action plan, specially about Bhagat Singh and Dutt. I had brought with me photos of the duo. Looking at the photos everyone except Azad was in tears. Perhaps Azad held himself in control since the rest of us would not be able to restrain ourselves upon finding tears in his eyes. Meanwhile one of the comrades got up to go to the other room and one of his feet fell upon a newspaper carrying photos of Bhagat Singh and Dutt. While we all were lost in our own selves, Azad noticed it, and burst out in anger. We were all at a loss upon this 'explosion'. But soon after, composing himself, caressing the hands of the defaulter comrade with tears of remorse in his eyes said, "These people are now nation's property.... are Martyrs.... Nation would hold them in reverence. As of now, they stand on a grand pedestal. To place feet on their portraits presently amounts to, trampling upon the soul of nation.'...his voice got stiffled with emotions.

"The immediate agenda at that juncture was *how to rescue Bhagat Singh and Dutt*. Various proposals were mooted with none getting finalised. One by one, other comrades went out here and there except myself and Azad; since I had to leave Jhansi the same evening, I continued talking with Azad. My desire was in fact to target the Viceroy, a task which I thought was within our reach. I suggested that I myself and Jai Dev Kapoor be assigned this task. But for Azad rescuing our two arrested comrades was the top priority. Hearing my proposal, the deepest emotional chord of Azad's heart was touched; said he, 'Henceforth I shall not allow individual comrades to plunge

into action.' After a pause he poured out his heart saying, 'Does it behove me as a commander to keep on adding fresh cadres one by one, to make them my own, and then plunge them into action by my own hands while I hold myself back to garner a fresh lot of comrades to stoke them into the fire', he tenderly caressed my hands while saying these words.

"Azad held each of us as his flesh and blood but till then I had never seen him being so overwhelmingly emotional about us, more like a mother than like a father. Said he, 'Now if at all some action has to be undertaken, we shall all go in unison. Till then keep yourself in reserve and tell Hari (Jai Dev) also the same,' perhaps hinting at the rescue of the two comrades.

Surinder Nath Pandey

Unexpectedly, same afternoon Surinder Pandey came there with the news that police raid was imminent. Yet none could safely leave the house till it was dark, and to avoid attracting notice, we had to leave one by one. Notwithstanding our persistant insistence on Azad leaving first he chose to use his prerogative of the Commander instead saying, 'In my capacity as Commander-in-Chief of the party, I order you four, namely, Raj-Guru, Surinder Pandey, Kundan Lal and you (Shiv Verma) to leave the house one by one.' He kept with him Mahore and Sadashiv who were like his right and left hands. Azad stood up to see us off; I became emotional; Raj Guru too was beyond himself.

'Worry not *Prabhat*; none can touch me while I am alive' said Azad, 'And these two are with me anyway.'

I was struck by the sudden change in Azad's stance; whereas a few moments back he was at a highly emotional plane, whereas presently he stood calm, nonchalantly observing his comrades obeying his commands — as if the Commnder-in-Chief in him was now in action.

"All the way I was pondering over Azad's fate; we learnt later that he had had left moments before the police raid. I came back to Saharanpur from Agra. His restlessness to retrieve Bhagat Singh and Dutt, his attachment to his comrades, his stern will to strive for the ideal, his longing for the freedom of Motherland, his unshakeable faith in Mahore-Sadashiv besides his Mauser, all this kept on haunting me while I was leaving Jhansi.

Writes **Mahaur**, "The news of Phaninder Ghosh turning an approver after his arrest, (He was called *Dada* by everyone in the Party) had appeared in the newspapers: 'Dada' was the member of the Central Committee and I was his fan. I said to Azad in a lighter vein, 'What sort of people are these journalists? Earlier they had reported Bhagat Singh becoming an approver and now they are saying so for 'Dada'. Azad turned serious and said, 'Whatever may be the case, we will have to be on guard.' So we remained fully vigilant. One day many places were raided in Jhansi. Master Rudra Narain had a clue that searches on a large scale would be carried out in the next morning.

"Jhansi police was quite sure that Masterji had links with the revolutionaries and he must be knowing Azad's whereabouts. The secret police personnel had also been coming from outside to Jhansi in search of Azad. But the worry of the Jhansi secret police was that lest the outside police nab Azad from here. So either they arrest Azad themselves, or it would be better he should not arrested from Jhansi. Masterji had got the above hints from local police. Masterji came to us at 10 PM and cautioned all of us that possibly searches would begin in the early hours of the following morning by the police which had come from outside.

"We removed all our belongings from the old places and Azad, Sadashiv and I also left Jhansi. Vaishmpayan was already out of Jhansi at that time. We could not to get in touch with Ram Dularey Sharma, with whom we had kept our clothes etc, though we sent to him some messages. Next morning, Azad himself went to his house on his cycle and found a crowd

of people and police outside the house. He did not think it proper to reverse his cycle and thus making his way indifferently through the crowd, asking the police as to what was the matter, he moved ahead. After some time when we met again at the appoined place, Azad told me, 'See what your *Dada* has done! The idiot had even counted the holes in the ventilators of the toilet and informed the police. Let's get going dear philosopher. Let us move. Police has taken Ram Dularey and Masterji to police station. I have learnt that your *dada* had come with the police.'

'I wonder how Azad could gather so much information in such a short time. Phaninder Kumar really had become an approver. He had informed the police about about Ram Dularey and his address. He had been in his house for a few days.

As far as have I observed, Azad never got over emotional. Of course, with a few associates, some old and broken pistols, revolvers and hand made bombs made in dingy hideouts and we were challenging the mighty British empire which can by all means be said to be funny and it had been said also, but about this neither Azad nor any of his associates in the Party had any illusion as to how much could be accomplished with the broken weapons and a handful of comrades? Whatever was possible, only that was attempted? We had never built castles in the air like *Sheikhchili's*.'

"The days when Azad worked in he Sadar Bazar Jhansi's Bundhelkhand Company, one day by chance he came to me greatly excited and handing over his pistol to me, he said, 'Keep this with you.' I looked at him questioningly when he said, 'I have gone off my head. Some White men have teased some women in Sadar Bazaar and beaten the people and abused them, behaved in a very unbecoming manner and I am getting worked up beyond control and again and my hand goes to the pistol again and again. It seems to me that I may not lose control over myself and something untoward may not happen. That is why I have come here. Keep this with you since I have to go back to work."

Azad's versus policemen

Masterji, reminiscing about Azad, once recalled that 'a few days after Saunder's murder but before Azad's coming to Jhansi, I had read news in the papers about this incident and I was certain that Azad must have been involved in it. I was over keen to meet him and when he returned, I fell at his feet. Azad wonder struck said, 'What you have done is amazing as in fact I should have touched your feet.' In reply I said to him in a serious tone, 'I have not touched Chandra Shekhar's feet, I have fallen at the feet of the great son of Motherland who had avenged Lala Lajpat Rai's death and punished those insulting the nation. You have added to my pride."

To Azad, for whose arrest, government had announced a reward of thousands of rupees and the police was searching every nook and corner of the country, this house of his foster brother was a safe sanctuary, where police visits too were quite common. It was not that he used to be in a remote cave; in fact he used to frequent their house openly and as for the policemen, who kept a vigil on the house, he used to play *kalai panja* with them in Masterji's drawing room and used to express surprise about their filmy style comments on Azad himself. When the policemen came to know about it later on, they were wonder struck.

How shrewdly aware was Azad about the psyche of the police, his (librarian) friend, **Raja Ram Shastri** has recorded an example! "When Azad came to Lahore once, he met me through Sukh Dev in the bazaar. Azad; while talking, moved towards the police office where they had killed Saunders. When I expressed my surprise and doubt, Azad's reply was, "The bastard policemen would be thinking that I am hiding somewhere in Bundhelkhand in some forest cave. They can't think of this even in their dreams that I am moving leisurely around the police stations."

Says **Vaishampayan**, "I is a matter of pride for Jhansi city, that no one, after one's arrest, had disclosed anything which the police did not already know; the residents of Jhansi protected all of us. Jhansi police also cooperated in this regard, even though in their own interest. When the people of Jhansi came to know, after Azad's martyrdom that it was Azad who was living there as Hari Shankar, motor driver, they felt so proud and wonder struck too."

"Insofar as I was concerned, those days I was already in Pratapgarh with my uncle. I had come to know of these happenings from newspaper well before receipt of Sadashiv's letter. Now it meant my breaking all ties with my people permanently and shut the doors of the house for good. We knew that living in Jhansi now meant kissing the noose or facing a bullet. I found out Azad's address at Gwalior where I had met him when he was with Patodar, Upon meeting him, he said, 'Now you forget that you have a home. As a revolutionary you have reached the doorstep of danger. Don't get perturbed by challenges and threats.' My reply was 'Having a person like you as my guide, I have no worry.' In heart of hearts I felt that the golden era of my revolutionary life has begun."

10

Death defying hunger strikes in jails

In view of life sentences having been awarded to Bhagat Singh and Dutt on 12.6.1929 in the Assembly bomb case their being sent to Punjab jails was certain: Whereas while being kept in a European Ward in Delhi jail, there was excellent arrangement for board but lodging quite contrary to this, the Punjab jails were hell like and being were very well aware of this, they had intimated the Jail authorities of Punjab, upon leaving Delhi, about their going on hunger strike. On 15-16 June Bhagat Singh was sent to Mianwali and Dutt to Lahore Central Jail.

Coincidently just seven days after their arrest at Delhi on 8th April, police had arrested Sukh Dev, Kishori Lal and Jai Gopal from the bomb factory in Kashmir Building in Lahore. By a quirk of fate Bhagat Singh's first arrest in 1926 was also due to a Dussehra Bomb explosion, and now the arrest of his bosom friend Sukh Dev to too was also made in the wake of another Dussehra Bomb Case in 1928. It so happened that a police havildar routinely visited a turner's shop for gossiping where they used to get their bombshells made, and he was a member of the investigating team in connection with the 1928 bomb incident. The turner mentioned to him casually that two *babus* were giving some strange orders. The havildar asked them to call him next time when any of the *babus* visits them which they did. The havildar followed the *babu* keeping himself at a safe distance and upon reaching the house he noticed that the water flowing out of their house was yellowish; consequently police kept a strong vigil and then raided the place.

During search, police found that the rent agreement for the house was in the name of Bhagwati Charan and hence warrants of arrest were issued against him also. Besides, Sukh Dev had got issued a book two days earlier from the library in the name of Bhagwati Charan. Following the recovery of this book, Raja Ram Shastri, the librarian too had to appear as a witness during the proceedings.

Dr. Gaya Prasad

A month later the main office of the Party which had been shifted from Agra to Saharanpur, was also raided on 13 May 1929, from where Shiv Verma, Jai Dev Kapur were arrested on 13 May 1929 and Dr. Gaya Prasad on 15 May; Above all the entire library, weapons, ammunition, explosives and everything else was also seized by the police. Thus almost all the active comrades had been arrested and were put on trial in Lahore Conspiracy Case. The hearing in the Case began in the premises of Central Jail, Lahore before Special Magistrate on 10th July, 1929 when Bhagat Singh also had been brought to Lahore; Bhagat Singh and Dutt being convicts were kept in Central Jail, whereas rest of them being under-trials were put up in the adjacent Borstal Jail.

On 14th July Bhagat Singh wrote a letter to the Home Member of Government of India in which he put forward all their demands, the essence of which was that being political prisoners, they were entitled to decent food, clothes, bedding, newspapers, books which should be made available to them and also a separate class may be created for prisoners 'like us' and all of them should be kept in the same ward.

In support of his demands he cited the recommendations of Sri Jagat Narain and Khan Bahadur Hafix Hidayat Hussain of Uttar Pradesh Jail Reform Committee to the effect that the political prisoners should be treated at par with those of higher class. The first hunger strike lasted 63 days.

Ghadrite Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna

Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna

Fortuitously those very days, the founder President of the Ghadr Party, Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna was also in Lahore jail along with some other *Ghadrite Babas*. When Babaji came to know that these young men had gone on hunger strike, he too announced that he would join them. Despite Bhagat Singh's desperate pleading to dissuade him, the Baba stood his ground and joined them. The hunger strike evoked a flood of sympathy for Bhagat Singh and his associates. Yet inspite of very strong public protests and representations, Government remained adament.

Out of the hunger strikers Jatin Das was only one who had previous experience of hunger strikes. Before the hunger strike, he had forewarned his associates that they were bargaining for a long ordeal by going on hunger strike, because hunger strike is far more challenging than fighting with pistols; it is relatively easier to die of a police bullet or on the noose but dying bit by bit, is extremely painful. If once embarked on this path, deviating from this or breaking the hunger strike would harm the prestige of the revolutionaries. I feel that it would not be advisable to adopt this painful and dangerous course in haste… yet once the hunger strike was begun, until and unless the government concedes our demands, the hunger strike should not be called off."

He had also suggested to all of them to remain without food for twenty-four hours and assess their strength and ability in this regard and if anyone felt that he could not follow this difficult path, he should rather not join the hunger strike. He also asserted that those who decide not to go on hunger strike, would continue to be worthy of his respect.

After a few days, in order to frustrate the strike, the jail authorities made a very mean move. In their earthen pitchers,

Ajay Kumar Ghosh

water was replaced by milk. Ajai Ghosh has written that he requested the sentry to get him water, but he said he had been ordered not to do so. After some time he threw the pitcher full of milk towards the sentry. It struck the bars of their cell and was broken to pieces and the sentry was also soaked.

The same thing happened in the case of Kishori Lal and others. They also broke the pitchers in the like manner. Ultimately the Jailer had to accept their demand and water was provided. Ajay Ghosh then drank so much water in one go that he fell sick and every drop of water came out with his vomit.

Forcible feeding

Shares **Shiv Verma**, "After eleven days, the jail authorities began to feed us forcibly. The Government had constituted a Doctors' Board for this purpose and its job was to take care of our health. Forcible feeding was done under its supervision. If a prisoner does not resist, it is an easy job: a rubber tube is inserted into the food pipe through the mouth, in which liquid food is poured in a measured quantity, and the task is accomplished but we had decided not to be forcibly fed and the government efforts were a challenge as well torture for us.

"This job was entrusted to two doctors, one jail officer and ten stout warders. The cruel warders forcibly laid us on the floor, and kept holding our legs and arms tightly till the doctor completed his job of feeding us. In this way measured liquid was put into the tube leading to the abdomen. All of us had devised our own individual ways of resisting this. Some of us knew how to cough in a particular way by which at the time of inserting the attempt; after coughing the tube was sucked up, and held within the teeth and as long as the prisoner was tightly held to the ground, the tube remained between the

teeth. Such prisoners proved great nuisance for the doctors. When doctors failed to feed us through the tube, they got furious with us. The cause of their worry was that our life was endangered in this way.

Those who had wide nostrils, thick tubes were used for them, and it was not possible for them to resist as described above. To finish the work quickly, the doctors tried to push in the tube with a jerk, which was opposed by the comrades with full physical might to the annoyance of Jail authorities and they used to become harsher. In such cases it often took the shape of a pitched battle between the prisoners and authorities.

Among such prisoners one was Mahavir Singh, a wrestler. Whenever he saw the Jail officials coming with their retinue, he blocked their way. When they joined together, and overpowered him and tried to feed him through the tube. One day a Jail officer was telling one of his colleagues that during this hunger strike of 63 days, they never took less than half an hour to feed him; during this very kind of ordeal he attained martyrdom in Andamans on 17th May 1933.

'When asked about forcible feeding by Jatin, Bhagat Singh had told, "I resist with all my power, but still they succeed, because my nostrils are wide and they drive the tube through my nose and get their work done."

As has been stated above, amongst us, only Jatin had the previous experience of as hunger strike, and he used to outsmart them, as he knew all the tricks of the trade. Therefore, the doctors had admitted defeat in his case on the first day itself. Yet on 26th July, after having done with all the rest, the doctors caught hold of Das. They wanted to deal with him after finishing rest of the work. After making him lie down on his back forcibly, they tried to insert the tube into his mouth, but Das pressed it within his mouth between his teeth, as was his wont. The doctor tried to insert another tube; Das began to suffocate but without opening his mouth the Doctor pressed the second tube, which instead of going into his food pipe, entered his lungs but because the doctor

was in a hurry and he did not want this golden chance to slip out of his hands. Das's eye-balls came out and without looking at his face, the doctor had poured milk in the tube. This had happened in the Jail hospital; by that time half a dozen comrades had also been admitted to hospital and had been kept in the same barrack. When Das began to cough menacingly, they ran towards him.

'His body temperature had shot up; he was coughing loudly and menacingly and was finding it very hard to breathe. Finding him in such a critical state we cried; a team of doctors came there after half an hour and they lost nerves upon seeing Das's condition. They lifted Das from the floor and put him on bed and tried to give him some medicine. Despite being unconscious, Das kept his mouth tightly shut, and shouted "No." When some of us said that he should take medicine, he, despite his pain, turned to us and smiled as if he was trying to say that because of our love for him, we were yielding. With a very charming smile he turned down our request too. His condition was so critical that, he would not allow the Jail people to succeed in their efforts to force feed him. Ultimately the doctors began to massage his chest and diagnosing his ailment as pneumonia, they left.

'After two or three hours his cough began to subside and feeling a bit better, he opened his eyes. Looking at his companions, a smile appeared on his face; in an under-tone he said to Jatin Sanyal, 'Now they will not touch me.'

On 27th July, Shri N.D. Puri, an IMS officer, informed the I.G. Jails 'Prisoner Jatin Das had gone unconscious when attempts were made to force-feed him and he was given the required treatment. This morning he had fever 102°. There was congestion in his lungs. He was given two injections and was massaged. He refuses to take anything through the mouth and it would be very risky to feed him through the tube, because his resistance would further aggravate his condition. He should be included in the list of Very Seriously Ill patients.'

"In this way he embarked upon the terminal phase of the journey of his life and he slowly and slowly inched towards

his imminent demise. But till his last breath his determination to continue the struggle remained unshakeable. After a few days, his body had got fragile. His eyes generally remained shut. The doctor wanted to give him anema, but he flatly refused. Some concerned Congress leaders and worthies suggested that Bhagat Singh may be persuaded to make him take medicine and this was done. He agreed upon Bhagat Singh's suggesting him accordingly. When some doctor asked him, 'How did it happen?' he said, 'You do not know, Sir how great is Bhagat Singh; I can't refuse him.'

In the same way Bhagat Singh was once again persuaded to make Das agree to take medicine. This time Das said, 'Bhagat Singh, you are fully aware of my resolve not to accept medicine, but still I cannot refuse you, but on the condition that you will not compel met to do so in future.' This was on 21st August. Fearing his likely demise, the government enacted the drama of freeing him on bail and for this purpose they procured a dummy surety too. When Das came to know of this, he flatly refused saying, 'Government knows that I am not going to survive and in order to get rid of me, it is playing the game of pushing me out. Government wants to escape the responsibility for my death but I shall never let government succeed.' Then looking towards us he said, 'I want to die here amongst you and all of you should strongly resist any move to remove me from here.'

'At that juncture our strike had been going on for one and a half months and except one or two, all of us had become so very weak that most of us were hospitalised. In spite of our being so weak taking Das forcibly out of the hospital was being resisted by us tooth and nail. We had placed our cots and beddings before the door. Viewing all this, Das said while lying in bed, 'Yes, now it is all right.'

"Watching the condition of the patient, the Jail Sudpt. a Christian swearing by Jesus Christ assured us that he would not try to shift him out of the hospital forcibly we agreed to remove the cots etc. After a week or so, Jatin called all of us to his bed; by this time, the authorities had permitted Das's

younger brother, Kiran to join him the hospital to look after him. Kiran had brought a packet of biscuits with him. Das, giving us all one biscuit each to eat, said 'We are not breaking our hunger strike. This is our last feast, this is the token of my love.' Everyone fulfilled his desire. Then he asked his brother to sing for him Qazi Nazarul Islam's song, which was his favourite....

'One night Das called everyone near him and talked to us for quite sometime. He enquired about the welfare of comrades who had not present there. He asked us to sing 'Bande Matram'. This was perhaps the last flame of the dwindling light. He remained fully conscious right till the end. Fearing his death, the Jail authorities made an offer through the Jail Supdt. Major Burgis that Government was ready to withdraw all cases against him and release him.

Thereupon Das asked them, 'Has Govt. acceded to our demands?' When he came to know that Government had offered to release him only, he turned down this offer.

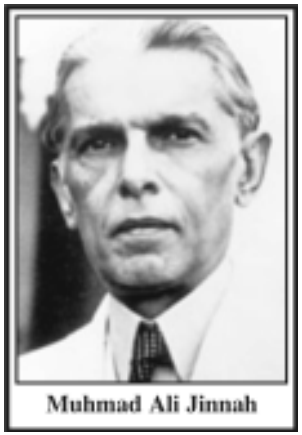
'On the 63rd day of his hunger strike, the doctors, judging his critical condition, wanted to give him an injection. They thought that, as Das was lying unconscious, he would not know about the injection being given. But as soon as the doctor raised his arm to apply spirit on the spot where injection was to be given, Das said in a horrifying tone, 'No.'

The Jail authorities had on 13th September morning permitted his associates to remain with him. After his martyrdom, all his comrades paid their homage silently. The Jail Supdt. also took off his hat and saluted him.

'All through his last journey from Lahore to Calcutta, every station was flooded with the people who paid homage to him with tearful eyes and raising sky-rocketing slogans. The tumultuous crowd, which gathered at Calcutta for his cremation, was so very large, that the Viceroy in his report dated 17th September which he sent to London had written, 'This was the largest gathering in the history of Calcutta, in which five lakhs of people had joined.

Jinnah's tribute to the hunger-strikers in the Central Assembly

Meanwhile in view of the hunger strike, Government came up with an amendment to Criminal Procedure code. The Tribunal had already been given the power to continue the proceedings during the wilful absence of the accused. However by then because of the hunger strike they had become so very weak that the doctors had opined that 'Even if they desire to go to the court, they cannot go.' This amendment was moved in the Assembly providing that if the accused himself was responsible for such a disability, proceedings could be continued in his absence.


Muhmad Ali Jinnah

Participating in the discussion on this amendment in the Assembly, Mr. M.A. Jinnah said, 'One who goes on hunger strike has a soul and he firmly believes his demand to be fair; can you, Sir, imagine a greater ordeal than hunger strike? Right or wrong, these persons are tormenting themselves in such a way and you do not regard their demands as fair and for this reason you are asking us to give up a cardinal principle of Criminal Law? If these youngmen continued to follow this course, I have a fear that if anyone of them died, what would be the situation?

"You know very well, that these people are bent upon dying. It is not a children's game, I would ask the Law Minister that he should realize that no one can bear the pangs of hunger strike. You should yourself try to remain without food for sometime, you will come to know everything.... One who sits on hunger strike, too has a soul. He responds to the signal from his soul and he is convinced of the justness of his demands. He is not like an anti social criminal."

Appointment of a Committee

In view of the day-by-day worsening condition of hunger strikers, and getting upset over countrywide protest marches, Government bowed a little and on 2nd September 1929 Punjab Jail Enquiry Committee was appointed. Four members of the Committee went into the jail and met the hunger strikers who were permitted to have the facilities of cots, table and chair, newspapers and light, as a result of which, except for Jatin, rest all of them ended the hunger strike at the instance of the national leaders; by that time Bhagat Singh and Dutt's strike had entered the 81st day and in the case the rest of them, the 53rd day.

Because Jatin Das was on death bed, hence it failed to enthuse them; instead after two days, his comrades, again went on hunger strike demanding that:

1. Jatin should be released unconditionally.
2. Bhagat Singh and Dutt who were being tried in Lahore Conspiracy Case, should be permitted to stay with other fellow prisoners who have been sentenced.

Meanwhile the Punjab Jail Enquiry Committee had also submitted its recommendations. On the 4th day of October, Bhagat Singh and his associates deferred their strike till Government took a final decision about the treatment to be meted out to political prisoners in jail. This decision was conveyed on the basis of the resolution of the Congress Committee through S. Sardul Singh but Government began to dilly dally about implementing the recommendations of the Enquiry committee. Bhagat Singh took it as a challenge. Even, beforehand on 20th February, through the Special Magistrate, Home Member, Government of India, was informed that the Government went back from the assurances given. He gave a week's time to Government to take a decision. On 28th January, he had also conveyed to the Minister of the Government through a telegram:

> "On the assurance of the Jail Committee, we had deferred the strike in the hope that the Government would give to the political prisoners due facilities and take a decision

satisfactory to us. The Resolutions of All India Congress Committee about the strikers was not brought to the notice of the Government by the Jail authorities, the authorities had refused to permit the Congress deputation to meet the prisoners and the prisoners of the Conspiracy Case have been mercilessly thrashed in jail.

Sd/-

Bhagat Singh, Dutt and others"

Government termed this petition written at the instance of the outside leaders. Government denied the charge of thrashing the prisoners on 23-24 Oct0ber and said that they had to be taken out for being produced in the court, but they were refusing to go.

Because of all this, in January 1930, Bhagat Singh and his associates remained on a week's hunger strike once again, as a result of the which, on the basis of the recommendations of the Committee, Government had to implement the new rules and as a result of this long, painful and troublesome struggle, Bhagat Singh and his associates had succeeded in obtaining reasonable facilities for the political prisoners.

11

Rescuing Bhagat Singh and Dutt

Tries Bhagwati Charan

Bhagwati Charan Vohra

Notably, the main suspect in Saunders' murder incident was 'Naujwan Bharat Sabha' and because Bhagwati Charan was the Propaganda Secretary of Naujwan Bharat Sabha, the police was already after him in this case. Thus there were ditches for Bhagwati Charan on both sides; The Party held him a spy and the Police regarded him the main culprit. In fact warrants of arrest for Bhagwati Charan had already been issued way back in 1926 in connection with the Meerut Conspiracy Case too and he had been absconding since then. Besides since as has been mentioned above, at the time of arrests and recoveries in the Kashmir building on 15.4.1929, the rent deed of the building being in Bhagwati's name, police added another charge against him.

Yashpal

Relates **Yashpal:** "All this while I was desperately looking for him and being unaware of his whereabouts I reached Calcutta to contact Sushila Didi specially because in view of the

fact that after the 15.4.29 police raid, Prof. Jai Chander was insinuating that the Rent Agreement for the house being in the name of Bhagwati Charan proved beyond doubt that he was in league with the Police and the raid had been made with his connivance.

"In Calcutta, for me there was no source other than Sushila Didi from whom I could have some clue about Bhagwati Charan's whereabouts, because for *Didi*, Bhagwati was not only a revolutionary icon, but a dear brother also, dearer than her own brothers. *Didi* was aware that he was in Calcutta and was also in touch with him, but she did not know his address there, which was but natural, as he was living in a slum area where going of ladies like Sushila was not proper. Yet every third or fourth day they used to meet at the appointed time and place. Didi had also told him that he was engaged in re-building the Party organisation on his own, though he had been personally passing through a mental agony, especially when among the revolutionary circles of Calcutta, Prof. Jai Chandra's was all in all.

"*Didi* and *Bhai* used to meet every third or fourth day near the famous shopping complex Chowringhi Square.

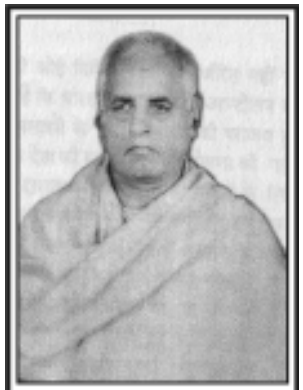
"*Didi* and I were going through the Chowringhi Square, when we came across Bhagwati who was going towards Victoria Memorial; his beard had grown, he wore a dirty *kurta*, a knee length *dhoti*, in which he looked like a Rajput *durban*. After Didi had left, he took me to his *Jhonpri* in "Bansal Tala". His place had to be approached after passing through a tunnel like passage, which further opened into a wider courtyard, where there were four storeyed buildings on all the four sides, in which there were small rooms like pigeonholes. Most of the residents of this place were *Marwaris*, who lived alone without their families.

Durga Bhabi holds the fort at Lahore

As soon as the proceedings of the Lahore Conspiracy Case started on 10th July 1929, Lahore once again became the hub of party activities. All the arrested revolutionaries had been

lodged in jails there. At that critical time, Bhabi's role can be easily said to be examplary, because the main place of stay for the relatives of the comrades lodged in jails, was her house and *Bhabi* spared no effort to make their stay comfortable. The kitchen functioined as a *Langar* and to sustain it Bhabi used to get up very early in the morning and toil in the kitchen till late at night, though Yashpal's sister Prem Lata, brother Dharam Pal and Sushila Didi were also fully cooperating with her all this while.

"Moreover, the headquarters of Defence Committee set up under the aegis of S. Kishan Singh, was also functioning from there: She was maintaining contact with jailed comrades and coordinating with the lawyers. In this regard also, it was Bhabi all by herself who had played a vital role in remaining in touch with the prisoners and liaising with the lawyers because she was very well aware of all the matters. Suffice it to say that the Party affairs could not have been carried out without her. Now Bhabi had given up her previous 'house wifely' disposition, and was acting like a prime mover and credit for which also went to her enlightened husband because of which she was emerging as his alternative. Bhabi performed all the above tasks very deftly and never let the shadow of fatigue or botheration come near her."


Sukhdev Raj

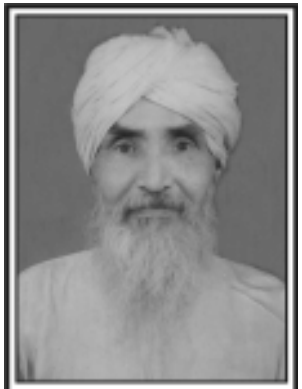
Recalls **Sukhdev Raj**, "For those like me, who had escaped arrest, Bhabi was the last resort. C.I.D. was chasing us like our shadows and whatever little talk we had with *Bhabi*, was commonly heard by them. But still *Bhabi* managed to share with us the needed information and the C.I.D. had no inkling of it.

"During these challenging days there were some occasions when there was neither money nor any one to be sent on some errand, but Bhabi never accepted defeat. On many an occasion she went to Dhanwantri

all alone and sitting on the back seat of his cycle, she did the required work. Bhagwati's detractors did not miss this occasion to spread dis-information and floated some malicious stories about her. One day I and Inderpal went together to Bhagwati and complained about this; Bhagwati kept quiet for some time and then calmly said, 'I have got big tasks before me as big as Himalayas. Therefore I am not worried at all about these petty things. I have full faith in my wife; you can tell one and all this on my behalf; If I have to trust anybody in this world, it would be best for me to believe my wife rather than someone else.'

"Above all, bridging the gap between Azad and Bhagwati, had also been possible, fortunately, through Bhabi, when after sometime Azad, in order to rescue Bhagat Singh and Dutt, had sent Vaishampayan to survey the Jail premises in order to enable him in making an effective rescue plan."

Bhagwati and Yashpal's team


Vaid Lekh Ram Sharma

Those days Bhagwati and Yashpal, were in Delhi making bombs to free Bhagat Singh and Dutt. One day Bhagwati suggested that instead of Delhi, work in a small town would be preferable to avoid the police surveillance. For this purpose they thought of Vaid Lekh Raj of Rohtak, who had been quite active in Naujwan Bharat Sabha while studying Ayurveda in Lahore. He had been to jail also for eighteen months in connection with Non-Cooperation Movement and he had also worked with Bhagat Singh, Yashpal, Bhagwati Charan, Dhanwantri, and presently, since 1926 his clinic had been working very well in Rohtak.

They felt if the Vaid agreed procurement of ingredients for preparation of a bomb, like sulphur, etc. and the chemical processes would become much easier, because many kinds of oxides of metals are commonly used in clinics. Therefore,

Yashpal approached him and he agreed without hesitation. It was settled that Yashpal would work with him in the guise of a servant and do the manual work of pestling and grinding. This arrangement continued to function smoothly but when task had almost been completed all of a sudden Vaidji learnt of a likely police raid in connection with some other case, hence Yashpal immediately returned to Delhi after collecting everything.

Ahmedgarh dacoity to rob government treasury.

Hardly would anyone be aware of the background of this episode: It so happened that on 15th October 1929, an armed youth group stopped a train at Kup railway station, Ahmedgarh (Dhuri-Ludhiana line), tried to break open the safe therein for the money locked therein, but they could not break open the safe. Therefore they left the safe there and fled. Later on it was discovered that the group included Naujwan Bharat Sabha activists like Sher Jung of Nalagarh, Harnam Singh *Chamak*, Sahib Singh Salana and others.

Discloses **Sukhdev Raj**, "Bhagwati Charan had encouraged these young men for this purpose so that funds could be obtained to free Bhagat Singh and Dutt because by then his own kitty had got emptied. Soon after this incident, Durga Bhabi called Sukhdev Raj, and gave a letter from Bhagwati Charan in the name of Sher Jung of Nalagarh, in which Sher Jung had been asked to handover him the money with him."

Actually Sher Jung had come in contact with the revolutionary Party through Bhagwati's teacher/his sister's husband Udai Vir Shastri, who was the Professor of Sanskrit in the National College and also a neighbour of the Vohra family in Lahore. So much so that Durga Bhabi used to leave her little Shachi with Mrs. Shastri whenever she went out to teach in Kanya Vidyala.

Scheme to blow up Viceroy's train.

In the meanwhile Bhagwati Charan had on his own made

all the arrangements in this regard, with the close cooperation of Yashpal, Inderpal, Vaid Lekh Ram yet he did not want to execute the plan without the Party's stamp of approval. To this end it was necessary to meet Azad, for which he had approached Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi at Kanpur, who had plainly told him that Azad did not want to see him and moreover, such a step at the present juncture would be inadvisable. Therefore this plan was deferred and the implements, etc, which had been fitted were removed.

Azad's efforts to rescue his comrades

Soon after leaving Kanpur for Jhansi, Azad began to draw up plans to free Bhagat Singh and Dutt from jail and to the end, he sent on or two comrades to Lahore to have an idea of the jail for situational study but the information furnished by them did not satisfy him. Therefore he sent Vaishampayan, assisted by Kashi Ram, to Lahore because Kashi Ram was familiar with Lahore, while Vaishampayan was not. During the rail journey, Kashi Ram went wrong in his judgement in consequence of which they narrowly escaped arrest at Amritsar station. Therefore, Vaishampayan got cautious and he thought it proper to avoid following Kashi Ram blindly. This policy stood him in good stead as on reaching Lahore when Kashi Ram was asked by Vaishampayan as to where they had to stay, his reply was "in Bradlaugh Hall'. Vaishampayan knew that since the relatives of all the revolutionaries stayed there and therefore CID would be keeping a close watch there. Hence he entrusted his luggage to Kashi Ram and went to sleep in the adjoining park. Next day arrangement for his stay was made with a student of Oriental Sanskrit College.

Sunday used to be the day when the relatives of the prisoners were allowed to meet their relatives, and on the same day Bhagat Singh and Dutt used to be taken from Central Jail to Borstal Jail. It is worth noting that earlier they were taken on foot to and fro, but since Police had some suspicion, it had begun to escort them in a vehicle. On his first visit to the jail Vaishampayan could have only a glimpse of his dear comrades.

He observed all this for two or three Sundays and as he felt that the purpose for which he had come had been served therefore he thought of going back. The person with whom he had been put up was informed by Vaishampayan that he would go back now and he should book a Kanpur ticket for him. However, when that person told him that he had been ordered to continue staying here, he was taken aback, and he could not make head or tail of this as he had been sent there by Azad, and only he could give such an order. But then through whom could he have sent this message? Kanshi Ram had also not met him for many days. As he could not think of anything else, he said to the messenger to let him meet the person who had made arrangements of his stay and was told that the person was Inderpal.

Inderpal when asked disclosed that this arrangement had in fact been made by Shrimati Durga Vohra. Vaishampayan was startled on hearing her name, because before leaving Kanpur, Azad had warned him that he should not get in touch with Vohra family at any cost, because they were suspected of being in league with the Police. But Vaishampayan thought that as it was she who had made arrangement for his stay for so many days and there was no hitch at all in getting him arrested if she so desireed; hence there must be some misunderstanding somewhere. Therefore he instantly made up his mind to meet Durga Vohra. When he met Durga Vohra the next day, the first question shot by him was "What do you know about me?"

"Why? You have come from Delhi and Bhagwati has sent you.'

"But no. I have been sent here by Azad's and now I am to go back to him."

Durga's face bloomed on hearing Azad's name and she said, "Bhagwati Charan is very anxious to meet him and has tried to see him many a time, but had failed. It is excellent that you have met me. Please stay on for some time and I will send for my husband.' But Vaishampayan was not ready to stay there even for a moment. Therefore he said, 'I will go back

and tell Azad about all this. Of course if both of them cooperate, it would be really wonderful."

Azad-Bhagwati unison — November 1929

Narrates **Vaishampayan**, "Azad, after my return from Lahore was very happy to see me since there had been no contact between us since I had left for Lahore. Besides he had heard about the arrest of a revolutionary in Punjab and he was concerned that the person held may not be myself. I gave him the entire report. Coincidently those very days another comrade too had assured Azad that there was no point in casting a doubt on Bhagwati and Azad was already in two minds on this issue. After listening to my tale, he agreed to meet him. Consequently I was asked to contact Bhagwati at Delhi and bring him along to Kanpur. I went to Delhi and met Yashpal and Bhagwati; we both reached Kanpur, whereupon I left them in a house in Chatai Mahal area and accompanied Azad there.

'Azad met Bhagwati just as long separated brothers meet. Azad admitted that he had really been refusing to meet Bhagwati, but for this he was not to blame very much, because in the absence of having first hand source of his own sources of information, he had to depend on hearsay. It was apparent that how much hatred had been instilled in the mind of a sagacious like Azad that for so long he was not ready even to hear his name.

Soon thereafter, Azad made changes in the Central Committee and included Bhagwati and Yashpal also.

Bomb explosion under Viceroy's train.

The Central Committee decided that the attempt to rescue Bhagat Singh and Dutt may be deferred and action on Viceroy's train may be attempted first. Yashpal and Bhagwati had already prepared the action plan. Therefore on the morning of 23rd December, a bomb was exploded under the Viceroy's train when the Viceroy, Lord Irwin was returning to the Delhi after attending Round Table Conference at London but only a little damage was caused and the Viceroy had escaped unhurt. In

fact due to thick fog, because Yashpal was standing at a distance of about 400 metres from the rail line, could not see the train clearly; Govt. was shaken, yet Police was not able to identify the accused even after one year of hectic investigations. All the same the incident did cast its shadow over the ensuing Congress session at Lahore.

Congress Session overshadowed

In view of the Congress Session to begin on 25th December, 1929, the revolutionaries, keeping in view its significance came out with the Manifesto of the Hindustan Republican Army, which was written by Bhagwati and printed in large numbers which was proposed to be distributed among the delegates of the Congress Session besides among the general public.

The Lahore Congress session of December 1929 was historical, because even a leader like Gandhi, who was a habitual compromiser, under pressure from radical leaders like Jawaharlal and Subhas Chandra Bose also had to support the demand for complete independence.

According to a contemporary secret file No. 1215/420/1931 — National Archives of India, New Delhi: "There seems to be no doubt that even the mildest supporters of the Congress have been carried away by the enthusiasm of the extremists. Indeed if the All India Congress Working Committee does not demand the commutation of these sentences as one of the terms of opening negotiation with the Government, they will be most unpopular with the extremist wing.... **Just as at the time of Congress of 1929, the threats of violence goaded the whole party to extremism (sic) so now threats are compelling the Congress leaders to take up the case of Bhagat Singh."** (Emphasis added)

Mahatma Gandhi had got a resolution moved condemning the revolutionaries for the bomb explosion under the Viceroy's train, and inspite of his desperate efforts, the resolution was passed by a razor thin majority of 1792/1713. According to a Gandhi devotee, Sarla Devi Chowdhury "Many of Gandhi's

followers like me fearing Gandhi's unhappiness had voted in its favour by going against the call of their conscience".

Gandhi's outburst and Bhagwati's cogent retort:

Gandhiji's article "Cult of the Bomb", in which the policies of the revolutionaries had been roundly condemned by distorting the facts, no effort had been spared to slander them, while on the other hand, just after eight months of the Jalianwala Massacre in 1919, on the blood soaked soil of Amritsar, the Congress session held there had affirmed its loyalty to the British Empire and congratulated it for victory in the War on his advice.

As a rejoinder to Gandhiji's article, Bhagwati Charan's article — "The Philosophy of the Bomb" is a very cogent writing and a befitting reply. Significantly 26th of January 1930 was fixed the date for releasing this pamphlet, the day on which Congress had to blow the bugle of complete freedom for the first time and after that this day had been celebrated every year as Independence Day till 1947.

12

Face to face with Court

After calling off their hunger strike on 4th October, the Party set up a three-member committee, which had to ensure that through the medium of the court proceedings their ideology spirit of sacrifice and self-denial ought to be made known to the people at large. Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and V.K. Sinha were the members of the committee. Secondly difficulties of visitors who came to meet the accused were to be taken care of; since the court was held within the Central Jail premises and resultantly, those who came to witness the court proceedings had to face insults and humiliations. Thus reporting of proceedings was affected due to these hindrances and it was equally essential to publicise these proceedings to expose the hoax being played by government in the name of justice. After nearly a month's struggle and pressurising the Government, some of the prohibitions were got relaxed as a result of which relatively larger number of visitors began to come to witness the proceedings.

On the 4th of October, when court proceedings were resumed, the accused while entering the court and also otherwise often raised the slogans of their choice — Long Live Revolution, Down With Imperialism — and occasionally also sang a song "India Will Certainly not remain a slave". When Raj Guru was produced in the court for the first time on 15.10.1929, the Magistrate said, "Your name is Raj Guru, and the charges against you are such?' His reply was, "My task is to educate the ruler." (*"Nam to tumhara Raj Guru hai aur dosh tum par yeh hai"! To Raj Guru ne jawab diya ki, "Han, mera kam raja ko shiksha dena hai."*)

On 19th October when Subhas Chandra Bose and Baba Gurdit Singh entered the court to witness the proceedings, the accused stood up to welcome them and as a mark of respect for them they raised the slogans — Long Live Revolution, Long Live Workers' rule, and 'Down With Imperialism; Babaji too folded his hands reciprocating their greetings: they were seated near the press reporters, where they sat for three hours and witnessed the proceedings. However, they were not allowed to meet the accused.

Later one day, accused learnt that Police wanted to search Jatin Das's brother Kiran Chander before his entry, about which there were very hot exchanges between Jatin Sanyal, Bhagat Singh and V.K. Sinha with the Magistrate. Similarly, on another occasion the accused raised the issue of not permitting the ordinary students to witness the proceedings. Bhagat Singh said, 'If you have charged some students and brought them before the court as accused, why don't you permit the lay students to witness the proceedings? Naturally, the fellow students of the accused would like to witness the proceedings, and hence, they should be permitted to do so. Therefore, Sir, you should review your decision, because u/s 327 of the Criminal Procedure Code, the trial proceedings should be held in the open court." Yet this request was turned down by the court.

During the evidence of approver, Jai Gopal, on 21st October 1930, the youngest accused, Prem Dutt reacting to his provocative gesture, removed his shoe and hurled at him in anger, which did not hit him, but an uproar erupted in the court. The Magistrate at once adjourned the proceedings, saying "Because of the unseemly behaviour of the accused, witness Jai Gopal's security is endangered, and therefore, I have adjourned the proceedings and ordered that all the accused may be sent back to the jail."

Clarifies **Vijay Kumar Sinha**, "Before passing such an order, I, Bhagat Singh and some other comrades wanted to make a statement regretting the shoe incident, but the Magistrate did not permit us to do so. So, we were constrained

Vijay Kumar Sinha

to file a written statement in the court stating that 'We have nothing to do with the shoe incident and this matter relates just to one person.' After filing this statement, there was no reason that because of misdeed of an individual, all of us should be held responsible for it and victimised."

However, following this episode orders were issued that the accused should be brought to the court in handcuffs. All of them decided with one voice that come what may, they would not appear in the court till the order was withdrawn. The next day, despite the very strict arrangements to produce the accused in the court, no accused could be brought to the court. Police succeeded in pushing only five accused into the bus. They could carry them only upto the gate of the Central Jail where the police did not succeed in making them alight the bus: despite their best efforts.

Next day, the accused agreed to be produced in court in handcuffs on the condition that their handcuffs would be removed in the courtroom but when this was not done, the accused demanded that at least during the lunch break their handcuffs be removed which was allowed. The handcuffs were removed, but after they had had their lunch, and the policemen attempted to handcuff them, the accused refused to yield, which resulted in a clash between the accused and the policemen. Police could not control them again, for which purpose Pathan Police was called, which brutally assaulted the accused.

This beating was particularly focussed on Bhagat Singh their favourite target. Hefty Pathans in their heavy full boots kicked them and kept beating all of them with their *lathis* mercilessly. This beating was done in the full view of the visitors from outside, which included women too. Consequently there was a very strong reaction to this brutality since it made

headlines in the press next day. A largely attended public meeting was held in the following evening in Lahore, in which this beastly conduct of the police was roundly condemned; almost all the newspapers very strongly and fearlessly came down heavily on the brutal conduct of the police.

However, the Police was not yet content by thrashing them only in the court by itself and after the court adjourned for the day, even more savage treatment was meted out to them in jail, as well. However, paradoxically a least expected outcome of their ordeal was that the Police and Jail authorities were forced to concede that they had the authority to beat the accused and if they wished, so could they beat them to death, yet it was beyond their power to forcibly produce the accused in the court. Hence the court had to yield and withdraw its draconian orders. In this way the revolutionaries came out victorious over the authorities in their struggle against the brute force; though there was severe pain in their bodies because of thrashings, yet all the same their morale was sky‘ high and at the end of the day they had the feeling of being the victors.

As a matter of policy during the court proceedings, the accused themselves cross-examined prosecution witnesses and especially approvers, but ironically, instead of challenging the allegations the questions were aimed instead at highlighting the charges, and they strived to put words in the mouth of the approvers, by which the philosophy of the Party was elaborated; the real objects of the revolutionary activities were brought out and the spirit of sacrifice was disseminated among the general public unambiguously because the court proceedings were published in the newspapers without any restrictions. Thus this medium of publicity was made use to the hilt, which conveyed to the people at large their spirit of patriotism in full measure.

Side by side whenever the accused got a chance to demonstrate, they took full advantage thereof. In the open court they celebrated, ‘Kakori Day’, ‘Lenin Day’, ‘May Day’, etc. The official side did not object to it and made note of all this in the court records diligently since in their view by by

doing so the accused were weakening their own defence and the job of proving them guilty in the court was becoming easier. On the other hand, the accused did not bother at all as to what sort of charges were being framed against them. For them the court was only a good means of propagating their views and ideals, so that the people of the country, especially the youth, would join the freedom struggle.

“From March 8, onwards the proceedings went on relatively smoothly till May 3, the last day of the proceeding before the Magistrate because on 1st May an Ordinance had been promulgated to set up a Tribunal to try the case. That, public prosecutor Noad would pay tributes to Pandit Sri Krishan’s impartiality was understandable, yet, despite harsh the treatment meted out to them right under his nose Bhagat Singh too sought permission to do so.

“Thanking the Magistrate on behalf of his comrades and himself, Bhagat Singh said that he wanted to tell the Magistrate that although on occasions they had to defy the bureaucracy, whose representative the Magistrate was, they had nothing to say against him personally. He remarked that the Magistrate was polite and too lenient and the prosecution had taken advantage of his leniency many a time while the accused did not try to do so.”

Bhagat Singh and his comrades were as free from hate as there were from fear!

Attempts to rescue comrades and Bhagwati Charan’s martyrdom

In order to carry out the plan to rescue Bhagat Singh and Dutt, Yashpal hired half a portion of a bunglow on Bahawalpur Road, situated on the outskirts of Lahore city and also hired hi-fi furniture to furnish it accordingly. Durga Bhabi and Sushila Didi also came to stay there to lend it the look of a typical household to outsiders, and typical also one of the comrades was projected as a cook, another a waiter and the third one a driver so that the occupants should look like a well off family.

Three days before the D-Day (1st June) on 28th May 1930,

Bhagwati Charan, Vaishampayan and Sukhdev Raj crossed the river Ravi by boat and reached a desolate cluster/*Zakhira* of trees in the jungle taking along a bomb for a test explosion.. When Bhagwati Charan held the bomb in his hand, he said that its pins were loose. His companions told him that it would not be free of risk to explode it and therefore the test should be deferred till the next day, but Bhagwati Bhai did not agree. Then both the companions insisted that if it was to be tested instantly either of them should do it as his life was far more precious than theirs.

Bhagwati *Bhai* paid no heed to their pleadings and said that if anything happened to either of them, the people would say, "He was police informer after all." After sending his companions to a safe place, he stood on a high mound and raised his arm to hurl the bomb in a ditch when the bomb exploded in his hands, due to which one of his arms was blown off, his belly was ripped apart and intestines came out; Sukhdev Raj also suffered a deep injury on his foot. Now since Vaishampayan was not familiar with Lahore, Sukhdev Raj left him with Bhagwati and he himself went away to make arrangement for medical aid; he hired a Tonga and reached the bungalow and conveyed the sad news. However, the death had taken its toll before the arrival of the medical aid; by then the sun had set. Left alone, Vaishampayan did his level best to save him but Bhagwati's soul had deserted him shortly thereafter. According to Vaishampayan 'Bhagwati Bhai kept repeating only one thing till his last breath — "My death should not affect the plan to free Bhagat Singh and Dutt on 1st June."

The comrades who had gone there to render medical aid, felt helpless; they wrapped Bhagwati's body in the white sheet which they had brought with them, and after paying him silent homage, buried his mortal remains in a pit dug on the river bank, and returned to the bungalow. Durga *Bhabi* sat still like a statue and Sushila *Didi* was crying ceaselessly. Azad had advised them to forego *Antim Darshan* (a last glimpse) of Bhagwati, as their going there would not be free of risk. In the early hours of morning, the comrades returned with shovel and pick-axe after performing his 'last rites'.

As for the general public it came to know about Bhagwati's martyrdom on 4th January only, upon reading press reports about the court proceedings, when Inderpal, the approver, besides giving full details of this in the Second Lahore Conspiracy Case, had gone with the Police and had got his ashes recovered, which were produced in the court also.

Rescue attempt on 1.6.1930

As Azad was looking for suitable substitutes to martyr Bhagwati and injured Sukhdev Raj, this whispering reached Durga Bhabi's ears also, and she insisted that she must go as 'I have the first right to take Bhagwati's place". Azad, with a lot of difficulty, reminding her about the little Shachi, dissuaded her. As per the plan, on the lst of June early in the morning, Vaishampayan, Dhanwanti, Yashpal, Madan Gopal and Tehal Singh the driver, led by Azad, reached the jail compound. When at about 2 PM Bhagat Singh and Dutt passed by them in police van, Vaishampayan blew his flute the signal as pre-decided, but when Bhagat Singh did not respond, they returned dejected. Later on it transpired that Bhagat Singh had given up the idea of coming out of jail in the wake of Bhagwati's martyrdom.

Accidental bomb explosions in the bungalow

A little after same midnight, one bomb out of a few bombs kept in the almirah, exploded followed immediately by another explosion. Fortunately, no one was hurt in any way. The explosions were so very loud; it was not known upto what distance the noise had been heard in the dead of the night. Azad instantly thought that if they could get half an hour's time, they could collect everything and disappear before the arrival of the Police. He at once contacted the immediate neighbour, an engineer, and told him everything and requested him that he should inform the police after half an hour. The gentleman agreed and all of them escaped safely with their bag and baggage.

During the search, police got a Delhi address, and after making special arrangement for an aeroplane, and taking along the neighbor-engineer for identification, they raided the Delhi address, but the culprits had already slipped away from there.

Bhagwati's passing away seemed to Azad as if his right arm had disappeared. Moreover, being short of money, as usual, upon finding Azad worried, Durga Bhabi gathered all her ornaments and placed them before Azad, saying, "Why do you worry *Bhaiya*, when would they be of use?' Azad, respecting Bhabi's feelings, smiled and said, 'Have no worry! We will take when we need. Till then, kindly keep then with you as Party's trustee.'

Azad was able to set up two centres at Delhi and Kanpur for preparing bombs and in order to procure arms and ammunition, he chose Jaipur. Those days Durga Bhabi performed the hazardous duty of carrying arms from one place to another. Later on, Bhabi mostly remained at Allahabad, with her father's friend, and famous national leader, Purushotam Das Tandon and also with the editor of the periodical *Chand*, Ram Rakh Sehgal, who made arrangements for Bhabi and Didi's prolonged stay.

As has been stated above that Bhagwati Charan's martyrdom was made known only on 4th January 1931 and it was but natural that his friends and admirers would have paid homage to him only after that.

13

Special Tribunal, a steam-roller

Worried over the snail's pace of the Magisterial court proceedings through press coverage of which the revolutionaries were deriving full advantage, the Government of India promulgated an Ordinance on 1st May 1930 transferring the trial to a Special Tribunal as an Emergency measure almost like the 1914-15 Special Tribunal where "there would be no pleadings, no lawyer and no appeal." The Tribunal was also authorised that even in the absence of the accused, the court proceedings against them could be continued which was not the case with the previous tribunal. It could award even the death sentence, against which there was no appeal; it included one Indian and two British High Court Judges.

On May 5, the first day of court proceedings, the police authorities informed the court about their inability to nab four accused, who had absconded, namely, Azad, Bhagwati Charan, Yashpal and Kailashpati. On the 6th May, every accused was asked about engaging a lawyer; most of them did not opt for a lawyer; one or two even refused to answer this question; one of them said, 'I don't regard this court a real court.'

As in the first court, here too, they all came raising slogans and singing songs however, the venue of the court, while it was earlier Central Jail, now it was in the building called Kashmir House. Here also on 12 May, as in the previous court, there were hot exchanges with the judges, whereupon police was called to forcibly evict them. The only Indian Judge in the Tribunal Justice Agha Hyder boldly refused to concur with his English colleages on this issue.

Justice Agha Hyder's Heroism

Justice Agha Hyder

Justice Syed Agha Hyder belonged to an aristocratic zamindar family of Saharanpur and went to study law in England, after which he returned to practise it. He joined the Allahabad High Court, where he was later elevated to the bench. In 1925, he was transferred to the Lahore High Court.

He was a member of the first tribunal constituted by the British government to try Bhagat Singh and his comrades in which was known as the Lahore conspiracy case in 1930. The other members of the tribunal was Justice J. Coldstream, who was the panel chairman, and Justice G.C. Hilton. On May 12, 1930, Bhagat Singh and his compatriots were brought to Poonch House in Lahore where the trial was to be held.

In protest against being handcuffed, they refused to get down from the police bus, shouting slogans and singing patriotic songs instead.

Justice J. Coldstream ordered the police to use force on them in the court room, which was objected to by Justice Agha Hyder, who also refused to sign on the proceedings of the day and record his dissent.

The judge paid for his act. Justice Coldstream informed the then Punjab governor about his "non-cooperative" attitude. Public Prosecutor Cordon Node was sent to Justice Hyder's house to pacify him, but the latter turned him out, saying, "I am a judge, not a butcher." He also lodged a formal complaint about this with the Chief Justice of the Lahore High Court Shadi Lal.

The British government reconstituted the tribunal, which decided Bhagat Singh should hang.

Consequently, he was replaced by Justice Abdul Qadir on 20/21 June 1930.

Justice Hyder expired on February 5, 1947 at Saharanpur.

The accused thereafter practially stopped coming to the Court, but, since the accused were deliberately absenting themselves from he court, the proceedings could be continued in their absence also. Thus all in all, the entire proceedings were held and concluded in the absence of the accused. On 10th July, 1930, Master Agya Ram and Surendera Pandey, were let off in the absence of proof against them and B.K. Dutt who had already been sentenced to be transported to the Andamans, was discharged. The rest of the accused were charged as under:

1. Keeping arms and ammunition and moving about with arms without a licence.
2. Murder and attempt at murder.
3. Loot and robbery.
4. To produce explosives and keeping in possession.
5. Freeing or trying to free the legally detained persons.
6. Waging or trying to wage war against the Emperor of India.

Court proceedings

10.7.1930 - The court was adjourned till the next morning and next day the accused were to be asked to give their side of the case about the charges were framed against them. As the accused were not present in the court copies of the charge sheets were sent to the court through the jail authorities on 11th July.

The draconian judgement of 7.10.1930

Invoking section 120-B IPC against all the accused for having entered into a conspiracy, the Tribunal held all the accused to be equally guilty of committing every crime. This drastic provision was based on the presumption that all of them had unanimously decided to enter into a vast conspiracy, and although different incidents were caused by different

individuals, every accused was made responsible for each and every crime. Accordingly, each one of them was held guilty u/s 121 I.P.C. for having waged war against the King Emperor aimed at depriving him of his sovereignty over India, prescribing death/transportation for life as punishment.

Sentences

1. Bhagat Singh. 2 Raj Guru and 3. Sukh Dev — Death, 4. Pt. Kishori Lal, 5. Jai Dev, 6, Shiv Verma, 7. Vijay Kumar Sinha, 8. Mahavir Singh, 9, Dr. Gaya prasad, 10. Kanwal Nath Tiwari — Transportation for life, 11. Prem Dutt — five years of rigorous imprisonment, 12, Kundan Lal — 7 years rigorous imprisonment, Des Raj, Ajai Ghosh and Jatinder Sanyal were acquitted.

Retaliation: Bombay Lamington Road shooting — 9.10.1930

On 7th October Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukh Dev were sentenced to death by hanging, as a reaction to which the absconding *Ghadri Baba*, Prithvi Singh, who had by then come in contact with Azad, besides Durga Bhabi and Sukhdev Raj, got so emotional that they resolved to kill the Police Governor of Bombay. By this action of theirs, they wanted to tell the government that "even after hanging Bhagat Singh and others, the government will not be able to sleep peacefully."

However in view of the high security at Governor's bungalow they decided to attack an all whites police station on Lamington Road instead, where they went in a car and fired at a White sergeant who was coming out of the Police Station. He saved himself by lying down but another English man and an English lady, who were coming out of their car, were injured. The accused succeeded in fleeing from there, but the police identified and recovered the car and understood that this was he work of the revolutionaries. However, no accused had been identified except that they included a lady also.

The real culprits could not be arrested and those others who had been deemed guilty were acquitted, because of lack of evidence.

Transporting of lifers to Andamans

B.K. Sinha in his account of transportation to Andamans narrates : 'In Andamans: the Indian Bastille', "It took three and a half days for our ship to reach Andamans from Madras. There were no events or incidents for us. We were lying in our block — everyone of us suffering from sea-sickness since it was our first sea-voyage. The police that escorted us was from Punjab who guarded us day and night. When they learnt that we were political prisoners and further that we were companions of the Martyr Sardar Bhagat Singh, they overwhelmed us with the warmth of their good wishes and care. They did not know — innocent ordinary constables — how to express their deep sympathy. One of them an old bearded fellow would come and say, "Don't be disturbed. *Allah* will soon get you liberated." Another would come and smuggle in some part of his own ship rations — a little sugar and tea. A third while on duty would take someone of us out, and on the plea of bathing would allow us to move about for some time in the fresh air outside our dark dungeons. All those little comforts and gestures lavished on us by our very own people, we so gratefully cherish in our hearts....

Mahavir Singh's martyrdom in Andamans

Mahavir Singh

Shiv Verma shares, "In January 1933, I along with some other comrades was sent from Madras to Andamans. Those days the condition of Andamans jail was hellish. Human beings were kept there like animals. Decent treatment, eatable food, facilities for reading and writing, and lighting at night, were the demands

for which all the political prisoners went on hunger strike on 12th May 1933. Before that perhaps no such strike, of such a large number of prisoners, and for so many days had ever been resorted to.

On the sixth day of the strike, the Jail authorities tried to force feed us. As in the Lahore Jail, after half and hour's wrestling, ten or twelve persons floored Mahavir Singh and the doctor placed one knee on his chest and, inserted the tube in his nostril and he did not bother to see that the tube, instead of going into the food pipe had got into his lungs. In a hurry to accomplish his task, he poured a litre of milk into his lungs and left to tackle other prisoners leaving him groaning in excruciating pain. This happened on 17th May 1933.

The comrades kept in nearby cells, who could hear Mahavir gasping for breath but were unable to reach him, began to shout. On hearing the uproar, the doctor came to see him, but by that time his earthly sojourn had come to an end. Mahavir was taken to hospital, but the revolutionary fighter, who had vowed to struggle throughout his life, had departed from us by then. The authorities stealthily consigned his body to the sea waves at night.

After the hunger strike was over, Comrade Jai Dev Kapur came across a notebook belonging to Mahavir Singh. On whose first page he had scribbled a beautiful poem of Russian writer Pushkin, which applied to him word by word. This poem provides an insight into his rebellious state of mind:

"I know destruction awaits him,
Who first rises,
Against the oppressor's yoke;
My fate is sealed and closed,
But tell me where and when
Without victims
Was ever freedom won?
For my native land I perish
I feel it and I know it
And in my heart, Holy father!
My fatal star
I bliss!

From Mahavir's clothes we found a letter also from Mahavir's father. This letter was in reply to Mahavir's first letter written from Andamans, the essence of which reads:

"In this island, Government has dumped the brilliant gems of the country. I am glad that you have got a chance to dwell in the midst of those gems. You may shine all the more living with them, this is my blessing *(ashirwad)*."

14

"We depart…"

Although the date of hanging of Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukh Dev had been fixed as 27th October in their respective death warrants issued on 7th October, a lot of things were to happen prior to their execution on 23.3.1931 which were mostly stage managed by their well wishers of course with their consent to delay their tryst with martyrdom as far as possible because each passing was adding to their popularity and by the time these gems had to embrace the noose a flood of love and affection had accumulated for them in the minds of the people.

Government had had some foretaste of this in the wake of bomb explosion of 8th April and then on the 6th June with the echo of statements made in the court, but these four-five months proved to be unrivalled in this regard.

These farsighted youngmen not only brought down the British imperialism on their knees, but also succeeded in demoralising their Indian opponents who, in order to save their leadership, habitually condemned them. Bhagat Singh had realised, because of his first hand experience of Kakori case, which he had seen from close quarters and before that 1914-15 Lahore Conspiracy case and Babbar Akail case trial that the court proceedings were a sham and therefore, instead of acting as seasoned lawyers they ought to behave as fearless rebels, by which the goodwill of general public could be obtained.

No appeal could have been made against this decision of the Tribunal as the accused had forbidden anyone going in appeal or to challenge its verdict, but hats off to the dedication

and resourcefulness of a team of patriotic and gifted lawyers, who succeeded in persuading Bhagat Singh to agree to their appealing in highest British court, Privy Council, on their own to challenge the legality of 1.5.1930 Ordinance on the plea that the so-called basis of this ordinance was not any real emergency but simply the slow pace of the proceedings. Bhagat Singh and his comrades also concurred because they felt that such a delay would further add to people's anger against the government. A famous lawyer of England pursued this case and argued brilliantly, but ultimately, on 12.2.1931 this appeal was rejected and written order to this effect was received on 17 February.

On the other hand, the Government of India had got so much terrified about the possible rejection of the Privy Council verdict that on 20th October, 1930, in a letter to the Punjab Government it was enquired as to what steps should be taken to handle the situation? The Indian Government had got so much nervous that without waiting for a reply from the Punjab Government, it intimated the Punjab Government and other provincial governments in its letter of 4th November 1930 that —

> "The position about Lahore Conspiracy Case is this that a petition has been filed before the Privy Council on behalf of those who have been held guilty, for which reason further action could be delayed. Government of India, in cooperation with the Punjab Government has made arrangements that in the event of the decision in the appeal case going against the accused, to take necessary action in view of unplending execution, giving advance information: Keeping in view the likely processions and protest marches in support of the accused, the provincial governments would be informed of the date of execution beforehand.'

Bhagat Singh's last chat with Comrades

This writer had heard one of the comrades of Bhagat Singh,

Pandit Kishori Lal, describing this final meeting; "Whenever we parted from him, he would always utter '*phir milenge*' — 'we shall meet again.' On this occasion too, '*phir milenge*' were his parting words."

December 1930

Shiv Verma, Jai Dev and others have their last word with Bhagat Singh in Lahore Central Jail... in Condemned cells....

Says **Shiv Verma**: "On the day of judgement we were prepared for the capital punishment to be awarded to Bhagat Singh: Even then I felt dizzy on hearing the decision. The hitherto guess had become a reality now. After our being sentenced we also were shifted from the Borstal Institution and sent to Central Jail. Both the old and the new execution enclosures were adjacent to each other. Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Raj Guru were in the new closure and we in the old one. One late evening the locks of our cells were abruptly opened and we were asked to move out. The government intended to move us away before our companions were to be hanged.

"The Senior Superintendent of Jail along with his staff marched us along towards the gate. After walking some distance he asked, "Will you meet your comrades?" We humbly thanked him for his generousity; he got the gate of the new premises opened and took us to the cells of Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Raj Guru.

"Despondency was writ large on the faces of us all feeling that we would never meet these comrades again. After bidding the last *adieu*, when we began to return one of us (Jai Dev Kapoor) asked Bhagat Singh, '*Sardar*, you are going to die, I would like to know if you are sorry for it?'

"Upon hearing the question the *Sardar* laughed heartily first, then turned thoughtful and said, 'When I set foot on the path of revolution I thought if I could spread the slogan of "*Inqalab Zindabad*" to every nook and corner of India by sacrificing my life I would think that I got the full value of my life. Today when I am behind the iron bars of death cell I can

hear the roaring sounds of that slogan rising from the throats of crores of my countrymen. I believe that this slogan will keep hitting the imperialists hard as a driving force of the freedom struggle till the end.' Then after a pause he said with his habitual smile, 'What more price could there be of so short a life?'

"I (Shiv Verma) was behind all of them. Tears rolled down my eyes while bidding goodbye. On seeing me sobbing he said, 'Prabhat, it is no time to become sentimental. I shall soon be free of all the worries but all of you will have to traverse a long journey: Despite the heavy weight of responsibilities on you, you will not cower and will not stop halfway accepting defeat.' Saying this he put forward his hand through the iron bars and caught hold on my hand.

"Approaching us, the Jail Superintendent whispered, 'March'. It was our last meeting with the Sardar...."

Off the record

I must have come in close personal contact with more than twenty revolutionaries of 1914-15 fame and associates of Bhagat Singh — What I discovered was that they never compromised with their human decency even while dealing with policemen and jail staff except when they were insulted. This 'generousity' of the Jail Superintendent speaks the volumes of the cumulative goodwill generated by the decent conduct of these jail inmates.

Appeal rejected by Privy Council — the fallout

After their appeal was rejected by Privy Council, the likelihood of the accused being hanged caused a big turmoil in the country and Bhagat Singh Appeal Committees' were organised in all parts of the Punjab

The object of these committees was to obain signatures of maximum number of people, on the basis of which an appeal was to be made to the Viceroy praying that their sentence may be commuted to life imprisonment: The appeal read as under:

"All of us appeal to you that the death sentence awarded to

Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukh Dev be commuted in view of the following:—

1. Because the case was not tried in an ordinary court according to the Statutory Criminal Procedure Code..
2. The proceedings were held in a court with special powers and virtually in the absence of the accused.
3. The accused were not permitted to appeal in the High Court.

"Now that proposals to abolish the death penalty are under consideration in England and a bill to this effect is before the Parliament and moreover while efforts are being made to build relationship between India and England on the basis of equity and fair play, the hanging of these youngmen would have a negative effect on the minds of people."

It was decided that the appeal may be submitted to the Viceroy on 17th February 1931, when "Bhagat Singh" day shall be observed in Punjab on that day itself.

Govt. afraid of Bhagat Singh Appeal Committees

"The real object of these committees was to incite the feeling of the people to such an extent that on the day of putting into effect the death sentence, people should damage government property and take out violent protest processions.

"In the Appeal Committees of Lahore and Amritsar there were the old workers of Naujwan Bharat Sabha, whose apparent aim at this time is to obtain signatures of the maximum number of people to submit an appeal to the Viceroy that the death sentence be commuted to life imprisonment (According to a news item appearing in the Tribune Newspaper of 28.2.32, by that time a lakh of signatures had been obtained. — Ed.)

"However, this also provides them an opportunity to hold public meetings and take out protest marches and people's attention is centred on the issue, excitement and sympathy is also evoked.

"Bhagat Singh Day was observed on 17th February at Lahore. Shopkeers had observed strike in the morning. The strikes had affected all the colleges. A demonstration was held

in the afternoon in which majority of students had participated, who were raising slogans with one voice — 'Throw out this evil government', 'We will take rest only after shooting down all the rulers.'

"After this demonstration, a public meeting was also held, in which 15000 persons were present and where S. Sardul Singh, Dr. Satya Pal and Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna were the main speakers. The two Congressmen — Sardul Singh and Dr. Satyapal just released on bail, instead of projecting the views of the Congress Party, completely identified themselves with the revolutionaries, praising these murderers whole-heartedly, called them 'martyrs' and 'heroes' as also 'Immortal Youngmen'. One of them concluded his speech saying — 'If Bhagat Singh is hanged, there would never be peace in the future.' In this way when the people were fully incited, they were asked to put their signatures on the printed forms.

"It appears that the moderate Congressmen were also falling victim to the speeches of the extremists. It is clear that if the All India Congress Working Committee did not demand the reduction of the sentence of these accused and did not make it a condition to make peace with the government, all its members would be one with the extremists, as had happened in the 1929 session of the congress, when threats of violence had driven the entire Party towards extremism and support for complete independence was declared to be object of the Congress Party. In the same way the present threats are forcing the Congress to support Bhagat Singh."

Measures planned by Govt. in the Punjab

The Punjab Government's reply to the Central Government's letter on this subject, was:

"The Governor has considered the entire matter and his suggestion is that a week before executing the death sentence, instructions should be issued to all the District Magistrates to the effect that—

(a) All the public meetings and demonstrations in support of the accused may be banned.

(b) Where there is no possibility of a meeting or demonstration, there is no need to issue ban orders.

(c) But if it appears that a protest march may be taken out, restrictions may be imposed u.s.144 twenty four hours before it.

(d) The format of such order would be that all the processions might be banned for a week, except those, which are granted permission by the police under section 70.

(e) In the absence of clashes with the Police in Amritsar and Lahore, it would be inadvisable to ban all the meetings and processions and therefore, the Governor is not in favour of imposing blanket ban at these places but action would be taken against those who make objectionable speeches."

The directions which had been issued by the Indian Government to all the Provincial governments, said *inter alia*, "It has been felt that uniform policy may be followed everywhere: Therefore, Government of India directs the provincial authorities that such arrangements may be made everywhere and some on the spot changes may be made as demanded by the situation. Government of India desires that where meetings and demonstrations have already been banned, the same should not be permitted there.

Legal battle continues

Patriotic lawyers had been making sustained efforts, one after the other, to delay the hanging. A team of lawyers of Lahore — Sham Lal, A. R. Kapur, Amar Lal Mehta and Prem Nath sent a telegram to the Viceroy on 16 February to the effect that:

> "Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukh Dev, all three of them, are important witnesses of the Second Lahore Conspiracy Case, because the prosecution has alleged that the accused in the second case, were the members of the revolutionary party, and the above named persons were the leading lights of the Party. It was also alleged that the bomb thrown on the Viceroy's train (in the second case) at the instance of Bhagat Singh and the the plan to free them on 1.6.1930 to attack the jail was also made in consultation with him; on these and other matters, the above named persons could throw more light. The accused have an apprehension that before presenting them as defence witnesses, they would be executed as ordered by the Tribunal. In the above circumstances, it is prayed that the carrying out of the death sentence be stayed till they are presented as defence witnesses in the present case."

Later on 16th February, the same team of lawyers filed a petition under the 1930 Act before the new Tribunal that Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukh Dev can prove to be very valuable witnesses and therefore, keeping in view the interests of justice, the concerned authorities may be directed not to take action regarding death penalty of these persons.

Sham Lal, A.R. Kapur, Amar Nath Mehta and Pran Nath (Lawyers) pursued the above petition before the Tribunal and on 17th February, submitted a detailed request, in which *inter alia*, in the case before the new Tribunal, details were given about the witnesses, Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Raj Guru and their alleged role. This request was rejected by the court the same day, stating that the issue was beyond its jurisdiction.

Death warrant outdated

Two lawyers, Baljit Singh and Sham Lal, through a telegram on 16th February challenged the order for carrying out hangings; they adduced the argument that the court or Tribunal, which had issued this order, had completed its term of six months on 30th October 1930 and has gone out of existence. Therefore the said order had become infructuous.

Rejection of Habeus-Corpus petition.

Immediately after their above request was turned down, these lawyers filed a writ petition in the High Court challenging the legality of their confinement in jail, which too was rejected by Justice Bhide on 25th February on the following grounds:—

> "The basis on which he detention of the accused has been adduced, is that in order to carry out the death sentence, no

court has the jurisdiction to issue fresh orders. The Advocate General of the government argued that the authority (Punjab Govt.) which had the power to defer the carrying out of the death sentence, also had the authority to remove the stay order on carrying out the sentence. There is no need to issue new orders nor is there any precedent. The lawyers of the petitioners argued that the validity of the original order had ended on 27th October 1930 and therefore new orders are necessary. In support of his argument they cited sections 391, 389 and 400 of Cr.P.C. Yet the court by accepting the plea of the government attorney, petition was rejected."

By this time written orders had been received about the rejection of the petition in the Privy Council too. Seeing no other way-out, a notice was served on the Secretary of State on 26th February 1931 through the District Collector under the Civil Procedure Code, to the effect since petitioners wish to resort to legal action in regard to the punishment and therefore the execution of the sentence may be stayed till then because if this was not done, no kind of recompense would make good the loss, and in that case our petition, would become infructuous. Rejecting this petition, it was stated that all this lies within the jurisdiction of the local government.

27th February 1931 — Chandra Shekhar Azad killed by a police bullet

On that fateful day Azad was to meet Sukhdev Raj for consultation in Alfred Park, Allahabad, at 10 AM and he had just reached there when Police surrounded them. Firing started on both sides. A bullet hit Azad's right thigh, which made it impossible for him to keep standing. He kept fighting in crouching position; when a bullet hit his right shoulder a few moments later and his right arm got disabled. He then started firing with his left hand. He beckoned Sukhdev Raj to go away, who obeyed. After a few seconds a bullet hit his right temple and he attained martyrdom. Yet the Police fired a few gunshots at his feet to satisfy themselves about his death and only then they dared drawing close to him.

The myth that when Azad was left with only one cartridge, then in order to fulfil his resolve not to fall in the hands of police, fired at his right temple, is absurd because after his martyrdom he still had 16 unfired cartridges, which were recovered from the spot along with a number of empties. Moreover if he could not fire at all with his right hand, how could he raise his arm to fire at his temple? It was impossible. Above all the postmortem report rules out a self shot since in that case the skin around entry point of the bullet would be so much damaged that his facial features like nose, eyes, lips would have become too disfigured to be recognised, which are quite distinctly visible in the police photograph clicked after his martyrdom on the spot itself.

Soon after the tree, behind which Azad had confronted the police, became the object of worship and next day hundreds of persons flocked there with flowers. The government felt outraged and got the tree uprooted and destroyed.

Azad was cremated stealthily to prevent massive public homage and no one had any inkling thereof. Next day his ashes were found and taken out in a large procession. A relative of Azad, from Benares, Shri Shivnayak Mishra made efforts and preserved a part of his ashes, which in 1978, were taken out in a large procession under the care of Kultar Singh who was a Minister in the UP Government (A brother of Martyr Bhagat Singh), and were taken to his ancestral village where a memorial was established.

It is worthy of mention here that it was the same Shivnayak Mishra who had preserved Azad's photo when he was 15 years old about which none of Azad's near and dear ones had any inkling.

Countdown for the hangings

As per exchange of secret telegrams between the Central and Provincial Governments, the hangings were decided to be carried out on 23rd March in the evening at 7 and it was also decided that the information about hanging would be made public on 24th March in the morning.

Telegram—

Telegram XX No. Nil., dated (and recd.) 18th March 1931,

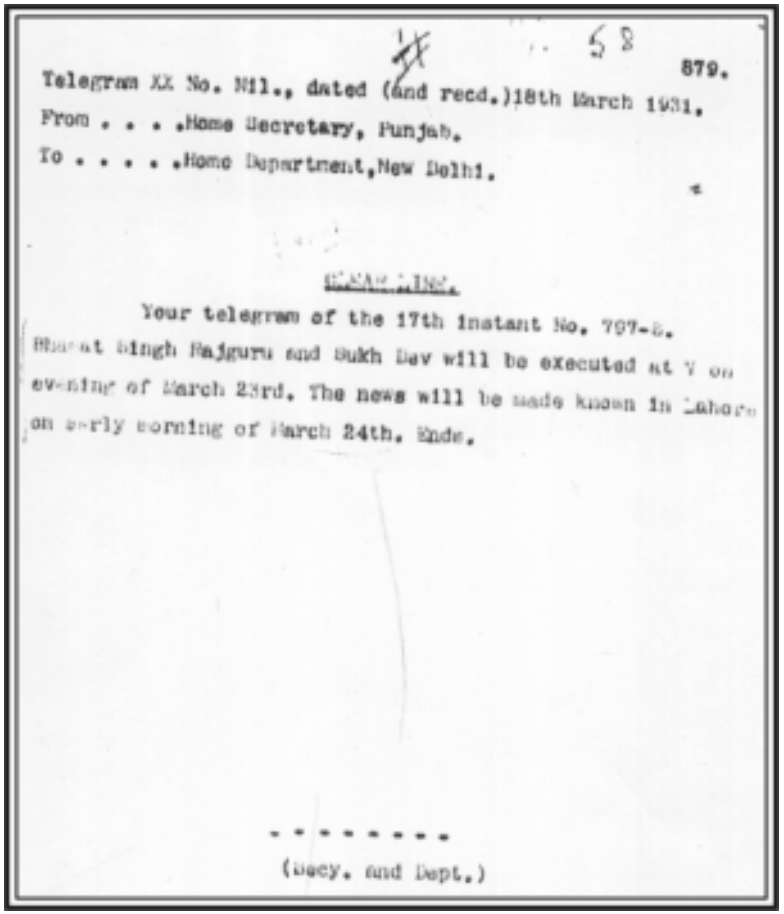
From…. Home Secretary, Punjab.

To….. Home Department, New Delhi.

CLEARLINE

Your telegram of the 17th instant No. 797-8. Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukh Dev will be executed at 7 on evening of March 23rd. The news will be made known in Lahore morning of March 24th. Ends.

(Secy. and Dept.)



879.

Telegram XX No. Nil., dated (and recd.)18th March 1931.

From . . . .Home Secretary, Punjab.

To . . . . .Home Department,New Delhi.

CLEAR LINE.

Your telegram of the 17th instant No. 797-8.

Bhagat Singh Rajguru and Sukh Dev will be executed at 7 on evening of March 23rd. The news will be made known in Lahore on early morning of March 24th. Ends.

- - - - - - - -

(Secy. and Dept.)

Gandhiji and the government in league — self-evident

Excerpts from the official letter dated 20th March from Home Minister to Gandhiji—

From:- Government of India, Home Department, New Delhi.

Dated 20th March 1931.

To:- Mr. M.K. Gandhi, House No.1, Darya Ganj Delhi.

With reference to our phone conversation **last evening in connection with the reaction to hanging of Bhagat Singh, etc. and measures to avert the danger posed by the agitated minds of the people** it is learnt a public meeting is being organised in Delhi this evening, which is to be addressed by Subhas Chandra Bose, and which would naturally incite the people, especially if provocative speeches were made.

Government of India would appreciate **your efforts** to avert this otherwise there would be full possibility of this assuming alarming situation.

Yours….

N.D. Emerson.

(Emphasis added)

On 22nd March a telegram issued by the Indian Government to all the Provincial governments stating *inter alia* that "the petitions made by the accused in the courts, would be heard "tomorrow". If the decision was reserved, the hanging would have to be deferred: and if these petitions are rejected, action would be taken as planned and the news of hanging would not be broadcast before Tuesday morning.

"As soon as we get information about this, you will be informed."

In the High Court

Rai Bahadur Badri Nath sought permission from the High Court to appeal in the Privy Council against the decision of Justice Bhide of 25th February. On the same day, Bhagat Singh's brother S. Kultar Singh also filed a *habeaus corpus* petition stating that Justice Bhide has mentioned only reduction in the punishment and has give no decision on the orders to hang.

'The petitioners fear that the three accused would be hanged on 23rd March, because their last meeting with the relatives had been fixed at 11 AM the same day.'

Both the petitions, 'The first, regarding appeal to the Privy Council and the second, *habeaus corpus,* were presented before Justice Bhide on 23rd March for hearing.

The Government Counsel informed the court clearly that he had been direcdted by the Government that hearing on both the petitions may be completed the same day.

The *habeas corpus* petition was placed before the Division Bench, which comprised the Judge Sir. Allen, Broadway and Justice Jhonson. Badri Nath, the Counsel, reiterated the fact said that the term of the Tribunal which had pronounced the death penalty to be carried out on 27th October 1930, had expired on 31st October 1930.

Justice Broadway — Who had stopped action on carrying out the punishment?

Counsel — Punjab Government.

During the arguments, Rai Bahadur Badri Nath highlighted the point that the important issue was whether the power to issue warrants vested with the Administration or the Court.... According to Sec.369 of Criminal Procedure Code, the Warrant should be issued by the same court, which had pronounced the death penalty.

The petitioners had not prayed for a pardon or mercy, because they considered that their above argument was quite forceful.

Justice — Have the petitioners made an appeal for mercy?

"No" said the Govt. Counsel, that the petitioners have not made a mercy appeal themselves; rather they had asked the Punjab government in their petition that they should, instead of being hanged, be shot to death.

Justice — This is also the appeal the mercy of its own kind!

Winding up his arguments, Rai Bahadur Badri Nath had said that the Law demands the prisoners to be released.

The Division Bench in its verdict on the petition rejected it at 3 PM on 23rd March.

The same day Justice Bhide rejected the petition to go to the Privy Council. Jiwan Lal Kapur, who became a Supreme Court Judge after Independence, had argued this appeal.

Last meeting with the families could not be held

The relatives of the three valiants, who were happy to lay down their lives, reached the Central Jail Gates on 23rd March in the morning for the last meeting. The Jail authorities did not permit Bhagat Singh's grandparents and both the aunts to meet him because they were the relatives of the second and third degrees and the Jail rules permit only the first-degree relatives. In protest against this decision, Bhagat Singh's relatives refused to meet and when Raj Guru's mother Parvati Bai came to know of this, who had come from Poona to meet him for the last time, she too refused to meet her son and Sukh Dev's mother Rali Devi, his brother Mathra Das and *Tau* Lala Achint Ram also boycotted the meeting.

> Mothers, listening to call of their soul, so bravely refused to have last opportunity of meeting their own sons Bravo!

During the pitch-dark night of 23-24 March 1931 while clandestinely cremating the three moths of the flame of freedom on the bank of the Sutlej, the power drunk tyrants would not have thought even in their wildest imagination that the last rites of their own two-century-old tyrannical rule too would be performed just sixteen years hence!